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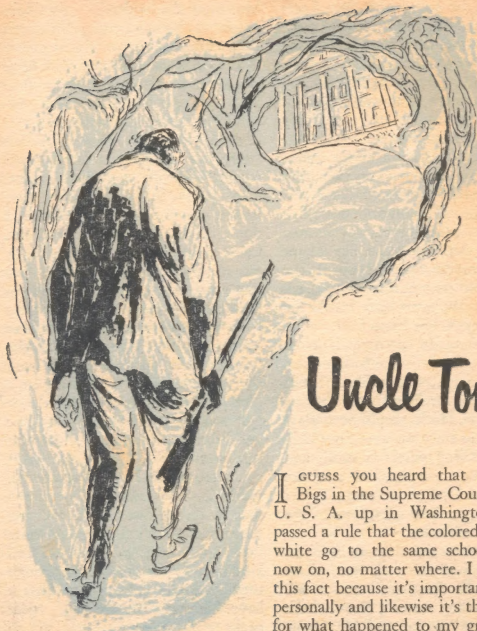
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Uncle Tom

When the new law went into effect, we expected trouble from the rednecks. But the real trouble came from my own grandfather . . .

BY DAVID ALEXANDER

I GUESS you heard that the Mr. Bigs in the Supreme Court of the U. S. A. up in Washington have passed a rule that the colored and the white go to the same schools from now on, no matter where. I mention this fact because it's important to me personally and likewise it's the reason for what happened to my grandpop. I'm colored, I'm fifteen and I live down South.

I was going to the Jarrod County District High for colored when the Mr. Bigs in Washington passed this rule and I was getting along all right. I'm no Dr. Ralph Bunche and I make

no claim of being one, but I was doing right well in my studies, especially mathematics and chemistry and shopwork. I'm no Jesse Owens, either, but I can go a right brisk 220 when the wind is at my tail and I can run those ends and I'm pretty good at forward-passing.

I can't say it made much difference to me one way or the other when the rule was passed by the Mr. Bigs. I figured it was something had to happen sometime anyway because we're all Americans and like Major Billy Weaver, Sr. said about the Negro soldiers when he came back from the war, everybody bleeds the same color on the battlefield.

I can't rightly say it made much difference to the white kids, either. In our town it wasn't like a lot of strangers or foreigners were moving in on them. Heck, they'd been playing with us since we were knee-high to a middling pinch of snuff, and there wasn't any kind of ruckuses except the kind of ruckuses kids just naturally get into regardless of the color of their skins.

I read there was riots up in States like Maryland and Delaware, which aren't really Southern states at all, leastwise they weren't Secesh back there when Mr. Lee and Mr. Grant was belting at each other. I also heard some Deep South states were going to have private schools so the colored couldn't get into them no matter what rules the Mr. Bigs in Washington passed.

We're a Southern State, but we're

kind of on the border, just a smidgin south of Mason-Dixon. No more than a long row across the river from us the whites and colored have been going to school together since anybody can remember. It wasn't anything too new or upsetting so far as anybody, white or colored, in our town was concerned. Our town's named Clayville and there's some 5,000 people all together live here, maybe 1,500 of them colored. I don't claim there hasn't been Jim Crow right along or that it wasn't wrong. But it was something you just got used to, like not owning a Cadillac. The colored and the white have been living close together here ever since the War Between the States and as far as I've heard tell there's never been a lynching or a race riot or anything like that.

I don't pretend we didn't have our grumbler-mumblers when this rule was passed. But they didn't count too much. First there was the rednecks. The rednecks live in the shanties on the east end of town and they used to call them poor white trash down here. Personally, I feel kind of sorry for them, even though they hate the colored and always have. The way I figure it, the rednecks wouldn't be any better off no matter if they lived South, North, East or West. They're just born lazy and stupid and full of hookworm and they got to take it out on somebody, so down South it's the colored they take it out on. Quality folks like Major Bill Weaver, Sr.

keep the rednecks under control in our town. Major Billy Weaver, Sr. says it's the redneck vote that elects Negro-hating politicians to office and gives the whole South a dirty name. The rednecks hang out mostly in Dan Squire's saloon and on Saturday night a quality lady or a decent colored woman wouldn't pass that saloon if you offered her a pretty.

We had other grumbler-mumblers, too. There was Mr. Trevor Theiss, who'd run for about every office in the state and been beat every single time. The only thing he knew to stand for was something called White Supremacy. I guess maybe that's still an issue in parts of the Deep South but in our state it hasn't meant anything to anybody but the rednecks and Mr. Trevor Theiss since they had what they call the Reconstruction. Mr. Trevor Theiss went around saying things like that every Negro and Jew was a Communist and should be deported or put in jail and in our town when a man goes around saying things like that they figure he's got a hole in his head and don't pay any attention except to josh him a little, maybe. Then there was old Miss Mamie Carleton who lived in a big house all by herself and was over ninety, I guess. Her daddy had gone riding out with General John Hunt Morgan's Raiders and she kept the Stars and Bars hanging above her mantelpiece like she wouldn't admit that Mr. Grant had belted Mr. Lee a knockout punch at Appomattox.

Folks just humored Miss Mamie Carleton because she was a nice old lady, really.

Now I come to the hard part to tell because it makes me feel ashamed to tell it. The worst grumbler-mumbler in our town was my own grandpop.

You got to understand it that my grandpop was a real old man. He'd had nine children in his time and my daddy was the last one that he had. He was over seventy-five when the Mr. Bigs up in Washington passed the rule about the schools.

Now my daddy died when I was a little boy but my mama brought me up right to fear God and respect my elders and I respect Grandpop and I love him, too, because he's been good to me and he's a kindly old man in spite of how he's crotchety and old-fashioned in his ways. He's been what my mama calls a fretful man ever since he was pensioned off. He worked for Mr. Amos Weaver, who was Major Billy Weaver, Sr.'s father, and he worked for Major Billy Weaver, Sr., too, as houseman for more years than anybody would want to count. When Grandpop's rheumatism, which he calls the misery in his bones, got bad, Major Billy Weaver, Sr. pensioned him and gave him the nice little frame house free of mortgage where my mama and I been living with him a long time now. My mama's the cook up to Major Billy Weaver, Sr.'s big house just like her mama before her was the cook there. The

way they judge a cook down South is by the lace curtains she puts on her batter cakes, or batty cakes as they are mostly called. Lace curtains are the kind of open-work scallops around the edges of the batty cakes and if batty cakes don't have them the batter's made too thick and the cakes aren't crisp enough. My mama's lace curtains were the prettiest of any cook in town, so naturally she was Major Billy Weaver, Sr.'s cook. Major Billy Weaver, Sr. is the biggest Mr. Big in Clayville and that entitles him to the best cook, I guess.

Well, I guess I'm slow in getting to the point, talking about batty cakes and all that, and I guess the reason is I just don't hanker to say the thing right out. But I'll say it and I'll get it over with.

The plain truth is my grandpop is an Uncle Tom.

In case you live up North and don't know what an Uncle Tom is I guess I'll have to tell you. An Uncle Tom is what the colored down South call one of their own folks who tries to figure himself an angle and bows and scrapes to the whites until the skin is right off his nose. Colored folks hate an Uncle Tom and decent white folks don't have much respect for them. Maybe a long time ago there was some reason for colored hotel waiters and pullman porters making like they were characters out of Old Black Joe because it might have got them an extra two-bit tip from white

folks, especially Yankee whites, who didn't know the score. But any white today is on to uncle-tomming and knows danged well that the lower an uncle-tommer bows, the farther he's got his tongue stuck in his cheek.

I suppose my poor old grandpop started uncle-tomming when he was young because he thought it tickled the whites and maybe he just couldn't ever get over the habit. My daddy used to joke him about it when he was alive and my mama joked him, too, but grandpop would just grin at them and say it made the takings from the white folks good. By that he meant that besides his pay he'd get presents like clothes and food and maybe a stick or two of furniture from the Weaver house. But, shucks, the Weavers would have treated him fine just the same, even if he hadn't bowed and scraped and uncle-tommed it. Grandpop never could realize that, though.

When my grandpop was growing up right after the Reconstruction they had colored schools down here but nobody cared too much if the colored went to them in those days. I mean they didn't send any truant officers around or anything like that. Grandpop went to school a little-bit, just enough so he could write his name and read all except the hard words in his Bible. I wouldn't go so far as to say he was dead set against proper education for the colored, but he didn't approve of it too much. He thought Negroes who

wanted a real book-learning education were what he called "uppity" and he claimed it was the uppity ones which caused all the trouble, like Ku Kluxers and lynch mobs, in the South. He had his own kind of pride, I guess. He was a right dignified old man and always kept himself real neat and walked straight with his chin up till the misery bent his back a little. He was mainly proud that he was a house servant instead of a field hand. He thought that was aristocracy, or all the aristocracy he was entitled to, anyway.

But when the Mr. Bigs in Washington, D. C. passed this rule about the schools, my grandpop set to grumbling-mumbling like an old coon dog that's sat down on a briar patch in the piney woods. You'd have thought it was me and not the Mr. Bigs in Washington, D. C., that had passed this rule. He took it out on me, like I could help it where they sent me to school. He'd say, "Ha, so my grandson's as good as anybody now. One thing I never thought the good Lord would curse me with was an uppity grandson in the family. My grandson's going to be educated so he can be vice-president of the United States of America, I guess."

I don't know why he didn't go whole hog and hair while he was about it and make me president instead of vice-president. But he never did. He just tantalized me all the time about wanting to be vice-president when all I ever wanted

was to get an education the best way I could. He started grumbling-mumbling so bad my poor mama was a nervous wreck. She'd serve him sow-belly with the drippings on his grits, which was his favorite dish, and all he'd do was say, "Ha! This is good enough for an old man like me, but you better get my grandson roast chicken with Sunday stuffing. He's going to go to school with the whites so he can be vice-president of the United States of America."

Grandpop had never been much of a drinking man, although we kept a jug of corn-squeezings around the house in case the neighbors should drop in, like everybody else. But once this rule about the schools was passed, the old man started belting the jug and when he did that his grumbling-mumbling got even *me* downright nervous with the fantods. He'd say how the Ku Klux was going to put their ghosty robes on again and burn fiery crosses and how the rednecks would come howling and yelling into the colored section and lynch everybody in sight.

He'd scare my mama half to death by yelling, "When you send your son to the white school, you better take to the woods, girl. The rednecks and the Kluxers will be coming here. They'll burn this house right to the ground and they'll hang me to a tall oak tree. You're still a young woman, so you better run. I've seen what the burning and the hanging are like when the rednecks and the Kluxers raid the colored."

Now that was a downright lie. Nothing like that's ever happened in our parts and my grandpop hasn't ever been more than forty miles from Clayville in his whole livelong life.

Seeing how miserable he made my mama, I'd forget myself and how I should respect my elders and I'd sass him. I'd say, "Grandpop, why you act like that? You just ructioning up some trouble when there's none around."

But he got under my skin. I was working for Mr. Grant Allan's grocery as delivery boy that summer and I had to make some trips to the East End where the rednecks live almost every day. I never was scared of rednecks. I just felt kind of sorry for the way they had to live. But now every time I went down to the East End I got a fluttering in my stomach and I kept my eyes glued to the ground like some old Uncle Tom whose head is bending low. There was a redneck kid named Tollie Burch who was lowdown mean, but he never picked on me because he knew danged well I could whop the daylights out of him with one hand stuck in my pocket. But he must have smelt my fear, like the animals in the woods can smell it. One day he hit me with an apple core and called me "nigger" and I didn't do a thing but go on about my business. It was all my grandpop's fault.

My grandpop kept getting more cantankerous all the time. My mama

always served him first at table, as was only proper, but all of a sudden he wouldn't allow that any more. He'd say, "Oh, no, not me," when my mama offered him his plate. "We got the future vice-president of the United States of America sitting down with us. Please serve him first."

That churned me up inside more than anything else he did. It made me lose my appetite and I started getting skinny as a sapling switch and that worried my mama, too.

I tell you the livelong truth, by the time that first day of school rolled around I was so tensed up I was like a boil about to bust.

To make things worse, when I started out from the house that day, there was Grandpop sitting by the front window oiling up his old hunting rifle. I said, "Grandpop, what you doing with that gun?"

He looked up at me like a sly old fox that's just crawled through a hole in the chicken wire. "Maybe I'm going hunting," he said.

"Grandpop," I said, "you don't want to go tromping through the wet woods hunting squirrels with that misery in your back."

"Maybe I won't be hunting squirrels," he said, trying to make out it was a deep, dark secret what he was planning to do with that old gun.

I got to school some way or another, but I confess it, it was the first time in my whole born life I'd felt real scared. I got to the new school house a little early and I steered

away from the redneck kids as much as I could and sort of joined up with a bunch of fellows from the colored district high. We didn't say much. We just stood around waiting for something to happen and hoping that it wouldn't.

Then all of a sudden Billy Weaver, Jr., Major Billy Weaver, Sr.'s son, came over and grinned at me and stuck out his hand and said "Hello," and everything was all right.

Billy Weaver, Jr. was my best friend and always had been. He was just my age, give or take a few weeks, and we'd grown up together. Of course his daddy was the biggest Mr. Big in town, but that didn't matter any. When you're kids it doesn't mean a thing if you're white or colored or rich or poor or Baptist or Episcopalian. All that counts is if you like each other. Billy Weaver, Jr. had been to my house many's the time playing with me all day and eating my mama's oatmeal cookies and watermelon pickles and I'd been to the big house many's the time and played with him and it was Billy who had got me the job as delivery boy for Mr. Grant Allan's grocery store that summer. Billy Weaver's mama was the nicest white lady I ever knew and when I was at his house she always treated me just like a member of the family although my own mama was cooking in her kitchen.

Billy took me aside before we went into the schoolhouse and he said, real serious, "There's some-

thing I wanted to ask you. Are you planning on coming out for the football team this year?"

I said, "Now listen, here, Billy. You know I couldn't do that. Next year, maybe, or some other year, but not this year. We got to take things kind of slow. We got to work things out a little at a time."

He thought it over and he nodded. "I don't know," he said. "Maybe you could be right. I know you wouldn't want to stir up any ruckus. But we sure could use a back that could throw that bullet forward pass of yours. We got that heavy Shelbys town team on the schedule this year and we're too light to go through their line."

I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do. You come down to my house a couple of times a week and bring a football with you and I'll show you how I throw that pass. You could learn it easy. It's a secret I invented. What you do is knuckle under your middle finger to get a spin on the ball."

Right after that we went into the auditorium for what they called the assembly. The colored kind of hung around for a minute because they were used to Jim Crow and didn't know where to sit and nobody told them. Finally, without anybody saying anything, we all just kind of moved forward and sat down. We didn't sit so far up front it would make us look pushy and we didn't sit so far back it would make us look like we were uncle-tomming. We

just kind of sat down in the middle. Come to think of it, that's about where the colored have always been in Clayville, anyhow — in the middle. At one end there's the quality white folks and at the other end there's the poor-white rednecks, with the colored kind of in-between.

I guess the first thing that the whites and colored really did together that day was stand up on their feet and pledge allegiance to the flag. In Clayville they always pledge allegiance to the flag on the first day of the fall semester.

In class, the colored kind of hung together, too, like they had in the assembly hall, and all of us were real quiet. We just sat listening, but I don't think by then we were really waiting for something to happen any more.

It was the same thing when recess came. At first, that is. But then while kids who had played with colored kids outside school all their lives came up and started talking and pretty soon white boys were throwing balls and colored boys were catching them and everything was all mixed up and I wasn't tensed up like a boil about to bust.

I felt real happy when I was walking home, because I knew it was going to work out all right despite everything my grandpop had said. When I went into my house Grandpop was still sitting there by the front window like he hadn't moved all day, and the hunting rifle was still resting on his knees. When he

heard me whistling and saw me looking happy, he was the most disappointed old man I ever saw. I felt downright sorry for him, because all of a sudden I knew what had been eating at him all the time and why he'd been so cantankerous.

He just couldn't stand to see his grandson having it a little better than he had had. According to his standards there was a place for everything and my place was in this little house and in a school for colored only and in a white man's house as a servant, like he had been.

Before he could start jumping on me, I took the bull by the horns and I spoke to him. I said, "Listen, Grandpop, it's not like you thought at all. There's some rough edges to be worked off and I guess maybe the redneck kids aren't ever going to like us very much, but it's going to work out all right for everybody. Why, Billy Weaver, Jr. even asked me if I was going out for the football team."

I shouldn't ever have said that last. My grandpop snorted. "Ha!" he said. "So the future vice-president of the United States of America is going to be captain of the football team!"

"Now, Grandpop," I said, "I didn't say anything like that. I'm not even going out for football. Not this year, anyhow. I just said that Billy Weaver, Jr. asked me, that's all."

I might as well have been talking to the knob on the court house door

for all the attention that he paid me. "My grandson is going to be captain of the football team and make home runs," he said. My grandpop didn't know a home run from a touchdown, even.

Things went along all right for the next few days. Billy Weaver, Jr. came down to my house after he was through with football practice and between the dusk and the dark I'd take him out in the backyard and show him the secret I invented about throwing a forward pass. I showed him how you knuckle under the middle finger to put a spin on the ball and Billy learned real fast. Pretty soon he was throwing bullet passes as good as I did.

There was only one thing wrong. My grandpop kept sitting around the house all day, and all night, too, swigging from the jug and oiling that old gun of his and polishing the barrel and that worried my mama. She thought Grandpop had gone dauncy. I told her there wasn't any cause to worry because there wasn't any ammunition for the gun. I'd looked to make double sure. But mama worried anyway.

Day in, day out, Grandpop sat in his old rocking chair by the window, oiling and polishing that gun and humming hymns and looking sly as an old catfish that has a belly full of worms without ever getting hooked.

When the first week of school was over, Grandpop did something a lot worse, although I didn't hear what it was he did until later on. It was

something pretty awful. On Saturday night while I was drying the dishes for mama in the kitchen, Grandpop walked out of the house and when he didn't come back in a little while mama got the fantods something fierce and sent me out to look for him. I looked everywhere I could think to look, and I didn't find him. The one place I never would have thought of looking was where he was.

You know what that old man did?

He went down to the East End to Dan Squire's saloon. That was a place he'd never been in his livelong life before. He didn't go inside and try to drink with the rednecks. He was too proud for that. But he stood outside and he talked to the drunken rednecks and the loafers when they went in and out, although he'd never had any truck with rednecks before in all his life.

And you know what he told them?

He told them his grandson was bragging that he was going to be the captain of the high school football team.

One of the rednecks he told that to was Tollie Burch's old man. Tollie Burch was the low-down mean redneck kid who'd hit me with the apple core that day he smelt my fear.

When Grandpop finally got back home that night, he was looking slyer and dauncier than I ever saw him before. He wouldn't say a thing about where he'd been and my poor

mama was almost crazy because she couldn't stay home all day to see he kept out of trouble and I couldn't, either, and it's not right to send your kinfolks to the county home for dauncy people if you can help it. No matter what we asked him, he'd just grin like the cat had got his tongue and sit there rubbing his old rifle with a rag.

I didn't find out what he'd done until I went to school on Monday. Tollie Burch and a bunch of redneck kids were waiting around the door for me to come in and when I did they started ganging up and shoving, accidental-like, and they called me "Captain" and the way they said it, it was a nasty word. I guess there might have been real trouble at recess that day if it hadn't been for Billy Weaver, Jr. sticking right by my side. The redneck kids were scared of Billy Weaver, Jr., just like their old men were scared of Billy Weaver, Sr.

On the way home I passed Mr. Milt Haines' garage and there was a few rednecks hanging around in front, like they do sometimes. Not redneck kids, this time. Grown-up men. They looked at me so hard I began to sweat. After I'd passed by one of them yelled at me, "Hey, Captain! You break any white boys' legs in football practice?"

I started running. I just couldn't help myself.

The worst part was that they took it out on the other colored, too. There wasn't anything you could

put your finger on. It was just that at recess the white boys didn't toss the ball to the colored boys any more and the whites walked home together and the colored walked home together. It hadn't been like that at first. And my grandpop was the cause of it all and I felt so guilty I wanted to go down to Clear Creek and dive right in with the sunfish and the carp and drown myself.

And Grandpop just sat rocking in his chair and humming hymn tunes and polishing his old gun.

Middle of that week it was that Billy Weaver, Jr. took me aside and told me his daddy wanted to see me up to the big house. Billy told me the Major had said I was to go right to the front door so my mama wouldn't see me coming through the kitchen and worry what I was doing there.

Major Billy Weaver, Sr. was waiting for me at the front door and he took me right into his study. It was a nice big room with leather chairs and books up to the ceiling and an oil painting of his grandfather who was a Confederate officer and a photograph of the battalion the Major had commanded in the second World War. He told me to sit down and I sat right on the edge of a chair like I had my britches full of fish hooks. I'd known the Major all my life and he had been good to me and to my mama and to my grandpop, but all of a sudden I was scared to death and when I tried to talk I kind of choked.

"Son," the Major said, "we're kind of worried about your mama. She's looking poorly and she's burned the batty cakes two days in a row and that's not like her. And what's all this I hear about you going around and bragging that you're going to be the captain of the football team?"

I told him I'd never said any such of a thing and that I'd only told my grandpop that Billy had asked me about going out for football but that I wasn't going to.

Then the Major told me about how Grandpop had gone down to Dan Squire's saloon and told those tall stories about me to the rednecks.

I've got to confess it, I started blubbering then like I was a little baby instead of a most-grown boy. I told him about how dauncy Grandpop had been acting ever since the Mr. Bigs in Washington had passed the rule and about how he just sat around polishing his old gun and talking about me being vice-president of the United States of America and how mama and I didn't know what to do.

"Hm," said the Major. "I see. I was kind of afraid somebody might make trouble. But I thought it would be a redneck like Artie Burch or maybe it would be old Mr. Trevor Theiss. I sure never figured it would be a fine old man like your grandpop. It's just because he's old. I'm going to have to drop by your house and have a little talk with him."

Well, I wish he'd dropped by our

house right away, because maybe it would never have happened if he had done that. The thing that happened was the very worst thing that has ever happened in the whole history of our family as far back as anybody can remember.

The Major made me take some money and told me to go by Mr. Joe Harbison's hardware and sporting goods store and buy myself a football. He said I had that coming to me for teaching his son to forward pass so good.

I walked down to the store, feeling good, not just because of the football I was going to buy but because I knew the Major would straighten things out for us like he always had. And then all of a sudden I quit feeling good.

Mr. Harbison said, "Your grandpop was in just a little while ago. Must be going squirrel hunting again. He bought some ammo for that old gun of his."

I was out of that store like a streak of greased lightning without ever even looking at a football. I ran all the way home.

The house was empty as a graveyard at midnight. And Grandpop's old gun wasn't there.

I ran out again and asked a few neighbors if they'd seen my grandpop. They'd seen him leave the house with the gun, all right, but he wasn't heading for the woods.

I started off in the direction they told me he was travelling, but he wasn't anywhere in sight. Finally I

decided I had to go back to the big house and get the Major to help me out.

When I got near to the big house, I saw Grandpop and I breathed a big sigh of relief. He was going up the walk toward the porch and he was carrying the gun. Major Billy Weaver, Sr. was sitting on the porch, smoking a big cigar, and when he saw Grandpop coming, he got up and went toward him.

Then I saw the most horrible thing I ever saw in all my life.

My grandpop stopped in his tracks and put the gun up to his shoulder and took dead aim at Major Billy Weaver, Sr.

The major just stood there with his mouth hanging open, like he was too surprised to move.

I ran faster than I'd ever run before and just as Grandpop pressed the trigger I made a flying tackle.

The gun went off before he fell.

But I hit him in time to knock him off-balance and the shot went into the major's shoulder. At the hospital they said it was just a flesh wound.

Next day I went to see Grandpop in the jailhouse and I took him some sowbelly and hominy grits with drippings on them and some of mama's watermelon pickles.

I said, "Grandpop, why'd you ever do a thing like that to Major Billy Weaver, Sr.? He's been good to you and me and mama all his livelong life."

Grandpop wrinkled up his brow

like he was thinking about it hard and he answered me. He tried to explain it in his funny, old-fashioned kind of way. But before he said a single word, I *knew*. It was a knowing kind of feeling that's hard to put in words, because it came to me all of a sudden out of nowhere, like the Spirit comes to folks who get religion at the protracted meetings.

Grandpop spoke slow, like he was trying to puzzle it out himself. He said, "Why, don't you see it *had* to be the Major? I had to shoot the Major because he was the biggest man in town. I had to make sure the lynch mob would hang me to the tallest tree, didn't I? And the way to do that was to shoot the biggest white man in town. Even a young sprout like you can see that, I'd think. After the lynch mob and the Kluxers hang me, they won't let you go to the white school any more and a member of my family won't be the cause of rioting between the colored and the rednecks and I won't be disgraced by an uppity grandson."

I shook my head at the poor addled old man. He'd done his best to explain it so I could understand, I guess. In his state of mind it seemed plain logical to him, like having the rocking chair always sitting by the sunny window. But there was a lot more to it and I knew now what it was. My eyes were wet and my nose was kind of running.

My grandpop's grandpop had been a slave and I guess maybe when

Mr. Lincoln freed him he'd been just as befuddled and bewildered as my grandpop was now. I've heard it told that a lot of the old-time slaves hated Mr. Lincoln because he freed them, the old ones especially. They were afraid. They had a world, bad as it was, and they were scared of any new world. You take an old coon dog that's lived a long time on the leavings at a poor man's house and you couldn't get him to go to a rich man's place even if he had five pounds of beefsteak every day there.

All of a sudden I knew my grandpop like I'd never known him in all my livelong life. He was a neat old man and he liked things orderly. He had a certain place for everything he owned and if you moved it he grumble-mumbled something fierce. He had a place for himself and his family, too, and he didn't want that changed, either. He'd figured out what his place was a long, long time ago and he'd done his best to fit it. Some of the things he did were downright silly, like his uncle-tomming, but he had his ways and that was that. Having a place was what made him feel important. I guess it was the most important thing on earth to him except his religion and his family. And now some Mr. Bigs in Washington were going to change it all and at first he was uneasy and then he was so downright scared he went plumb dauncy.

I understood now why he sat there day in, day out, polishing that old gun. When he was younger he'd

take that old gun out into the woods and it would give him a sense of power he never had in the world he lived in. He could shoot a squirrel or let it live. It was up to him. When this rule about the schools was passed and his world was all upset, he just naturally gravitated toward that old gun to give him confidence. I don't think he had any idea of shooting anybody, not at first. But he kept on sitting there, polishing and brooding and grumbling-mumbling, and he got dauncier and dauncier and finally this crazy idea popped into his head.

Grandpop was sitting on the jail bunk, eating his sowbelly and grits like he had an appetite because he'd done the thing he had to do and his mind was peaceful.

He said to me, "You better hurry off now, son. The lynch mob will be here any minute. I can hear them down the street already."

I said, "Grandpop, all you hear is the sounds inside your head. Nobody's going to lynch you. Doctors are going to look you over and send you to the county place for dauncy people and try to cure the sickness in your mind."

What I say about this law the Mr. Bigs in Washington, D. C. have passed is this: If they only leave it to the young folks, we'll work it out.

I been brought up to respect my elders and I do.

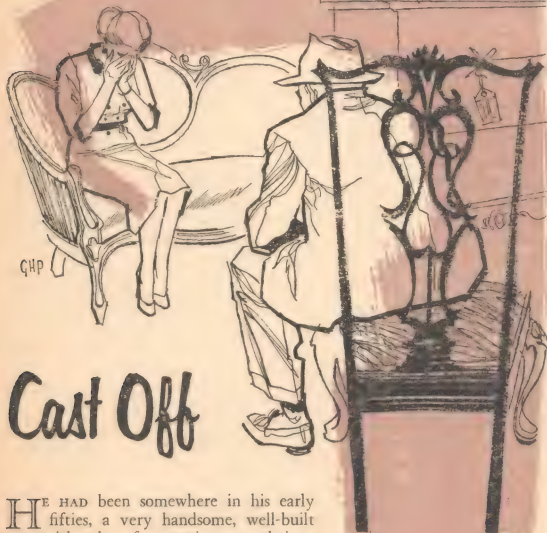
But I've got to say this.

The trouble with old folks is they can't stand change.

The old flatiron was no good for pressing clothes, because it was too heavy. But that's just what made it perfect for murder.

A Police File Story

BY JONATHAN CRAIG



Cast Off

HE HAD been somewhere in his early fifties, a very handsome, well-built man with a lot of wavy, iron-gray hair, a tanned, even-featured face, and a small Van Dyke beard that was hardly gray at all. He lay on his right side, staring sightlessly at me as I knelt down to examine what had once been the back of his head. Considering

the damage, there was very little blood.

Behind me, Walt Logan said, "Well, at least he didn't suffer any, Steve. The poor guy never knew what hit him."

I nodded, stepped around the body, and knelt down again to look at the murder weapon. It was in three parts now, but it had once been a huge, hollow flatiron, the largest I had ever seen. The bottom was nothing more than a thin cast-iron shell, about fourteen inches long, but the top and handle were of solid metal and, altogether, the flatiron could not have weighed less than thirty pounds. The top part had apparently been held to the bottom by four metal lugs, one of which had broken off and lay between the top part and the bottom shell.

I straightened up and glanced about the antique shop. I knew nothing at all about antiques, but even I could tell that there was no junk here. Everything looked very old, and very beautiful, and very expensive.

I looked over toward my detective partner. "Take over down here, will you, Walt? The M. E. and the techs will be here any minute. I want to go upstairs and talk to Miss Taylor again. Maybe she'll feel a little better now."

"All right, Steve."

I turned and climbed the stairs to the second-floor showroom. There was nothing but furniture here, everything from spindly-legged

chairs that looked as if they must have been made for children, to mahogany cabinets easily twelve feet across and canopied beds.

Miss Taylor sat on an all-leather sofa near the door, an attractive, dark-haired woman of about forty with a figure like a young girl's. I pulled a fiddle-backed chair near the sofa and sat down.

"You feel a little better now, Miss Taylor?" I asked.

She nodded slowly, not looking at me. "Yes. Yes, I think I'll be all right now. I — I'm sorry I went to pieces like that."

"I understand," I said. "It must have been quite a shock." I paused. "Do you think you can take it from the beginning now?"

"I think so." Her eyes came up to meet mine. They were very large eyes, set quite far apart and just a little tilted at the outer corners. Together with her small nose and full lips, they gave her a slightly Oriental look. "There's really very little to tell. I was up here, cataloguing some Queen Anne highboys we'd just received. I heard Mr. Edmiston cry out, and I rushed downstairs and —"

"Just a moment, please, Miss Taylor. When Mr. Edmiston cried out, did he just make some kind of sound, or did he say any actual words?"

"He just said, 'Oh! Oh, don't!' 'Loudly?'"

"Yes. Very loudly. . . . As if he were pleading with someone."

"I see."

"Well, I started down the stairs, and then I heard something hit the floor. It — it was that flatiron, of course. And then I ran into the room down there and . . . almost tripped over him. I wasn't looking at the floor, and I almost . . . Oh, it was terrible . . ."

"You saw no one near the door of the shop?"

"No. I was almost paralyzed for a moment, and then I ran out to the street. I thought I might see someone running away. I didn't, though. And then I just seemed to go all to pieces. The first thing I knew, I was screaming for somebody to get the police and a doctor." She shook her head slowly. "It was all like some horrible nightmare. I don't know how long I just stood there, screaming like that, but when people began rushing up to me it snapped me out of it, and I ran back into the shop. I locked the door, to keep the people out, and called the police."

"And the doctor?"

"Of course. I called the doctor first, then you."

"You didn't touch the body?"

"Oh, no."

"Did you know Mr. Edmiston was dead?"

She closed her eyes for a moment, as if the memory were almost too painful for her. "Yes," she said softly. "The way his eyes looked and . . ." She broke off.

"I didn't see a cash register downstairs, Miss Taylor."

"There is none. Most of our sales are for very large amounts, and almost all of them are handled by check."

"Mr. Edmiston had forty-one dollars in his billfold," I said. "That would seem to rule out robbery."

"He always left enough money up here to make change, in case of a cash sale," she said. "And he usually carried quite a bit with him. Usually three or four hundred dollars."

I took out my notebook and pencil. "You told me earlier that you'd worked for Mr. Edmiston quite a while. Just how long?"

She took a deep breath and let it out very slowly, staring down at her hands. "Almost fifteen years," she said. She seemed to have complete control of herself now, I saw.

"I'll have to describe the murder weapon in my report," I said. "All I know is that it's some kind of flatiron."

She nodded. "Such flatirons are very rare. It's the heaviest we ever had in the shop, and probably one of the heaviest ever made. Thirty-two pounds."

"I noticed it was hollow."

"Yes. That's so it could be filled with hot coals. It was made by a man named Muehller, right here in New York, in 1873."

"But why so heavy?"

"Mr. Muehller seemed to think enough men might buy such an iron to press their heavy clothing — the same things that, today, we'd have done on a steam press. But they

were never very popular. Hardly any men bought them, apparently, and they were much too heavy for women to use, and so Muehller gave up." She paused. "It's a strange thing, but I was thinking about that iron only a few minutes before I went upstairs to catalogue the highboys. It was such an ugly thing that I was going to suggest to Mr. Edmiston that we put it in a less conspicuous spot. Possibly with our cast-iron bootjacks and trivets. And then . . . just a few minutes later . . . someone used it to kill him." She looked away from me. "It's so hard to believe he's really dead. After fifteen years . . ."

"Did Mr. Edmiston have any enemies, Miss Taylor?"

She was silent for a long moment. "Not exactly enemies," she said finally.

"You mind clarifying that a little?"

She sighed. "Well, I suppose you'll find out everything sooner or later anyhow. It seems terrible for me to talk about such things . . . but I think he may have had at least one."

"Who's that?"

"Mr. Ogden. Jeff Ogden. He has an antique shop up the street."

"What was the nature of the trouble, do you know?"

She hesitated, fumbling self-consciously with a fold of her skirt. "It was because of Mrs. Ogden, I think. She . . . well, she and Mr. Edmiston had been seeing quite a bit

of each other. I think Mr. Ogden had found out about it. He had some sharp words with Mr. Edmiston yesterday. And then today — this afternoon — they had another argument. They went into the back room, so I couldn't hear what they were saying. But once in a while they raised their voices so much that I knew they were arguing. From the tone they used, I mean."

"You didn't hear Mrs. Ogden's name mentioned?"

"No, I didn't. But she'd been here just a few minutes before her husband came, and I just put two and two together. I might be entirely wrong."

"What's the address of Mr. Ogden's shop?"

She told me the address and I wrote it down.

"Can you think of anyone else who might be considered an enemy? For instance, anyone that Mr. Edmiston might be suing? Anyone to whom he's refused to pay money? Like that."

She shook her head slowly. "No . . . No, there's no one else, so far as I know."

I put my notebook back in my pocket and got to my feet. "When you looked at that flatiron, just before you went upstairs — was it in good order?"

"Of course."

"And assembled?"

"Yes."

I walked to the door. "Well,

thanks very much, Miss Taylor."

"There's just one thing," she said quickly.

"Yes?"

"I expect to be in the antique business the rest of my life. It *is* my life, so to speak. I'd much rather Mr. and Mrs. Ogden didn't know I told you about the thing I did. After all, I'm not entirely certain about *anything*, and . . . Well, I think you can understand how it would be for me, if they knew."

I nodded. "All right, Miss Taylor. And thanks again." I went back down the steps to the first-floor showroom.

The M. E. and the tech crew had arrived and were hard at work. I walked over to where Walt was standing.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Nothing yet. How'd you make out upstairs?"

"It seems Mr. Edmiston was playing around with another guy's wife. The guy was in here not long before Edmiston got slugged."

"Is he big?" Walt asked.

"I don't know. Why?"

"Because if he isn't pretty hefty, you can forget about him."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was just talking to the doc there. He says that Edmiston was hit with a downward motion. That means the guy swung that flatiron just like you or I'd swing a billy."

"So?"

"So have you tried lifting that thing? I did, just as soon as the techs hit it for prints. It's no trouble lifting it, but swinging it over your head and down is something else again. Try it once, and see how awkward it is." Walt shrugged.

"I'll take your word for it," I said.

"And another thing, Steve. It was lying there on the counter with half a dozen other flatirons, all of them smaller than it was. The average guy would have grabbed up any one of them before he took that one. But a really big guy — well, the sight of it wouldn't faze him a bit."

"Or a really big woman," I said.

"Woman? Are you kidding? Look at the trouble women have with regulation bowling balls — and they weight only sixteen pounds." He shook his head. "Steve, there isn't one woman in a thousand could swing that iron over her head like a club."

"I guess not," I said. "Well, I'm going up the street to talk with this Jeff Ogden."

"Take your time. It looks like the techs'll be here for quite a while."

A very pretty young girl with auburn hair and green eyes stood in the doorway of the Ogden Antique Shop, looking down the street toward the crowd gathered in front of it. She followed me inside the store.

"Didn't you just come from Edmiston's?" she asked.

"Yes?"

"What's going on down there?"

"That's police business, I'm afraid," I said. I showed her my shield.

Her green eyes narrowed slightly. "I thought I asked you a very civil question."

"You did. I don't mean to be rude. Is Mr. Ogden here?"

"No."

"When do you expect him back?"

"Not for several hours."

"Is Mrs. Ogden here?"

"I'm Mrs. Ogden. What can I do for you?"

I had somehow expected a much older woman. Mrs. Ogden was no more than twenty-two or -three, a lush-bodied young woman in a skin-tight green dress and small black shoes with very high heels.

"I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes," I said. "And I wonder if you'd mind locking the door."

She stared at me coolly for a moment, then shrugged and crossed to the door. She locked it, drew the shade down to the bottom of the glass, and walked back to me. "Happy now?" she asked.

"Thank you," I said. "I understand you and Mr. Edmiston are pretty good friends, Mrs. Ogden."

"That's right. . . . Why?"

"And your husband — how do he and Mr. Edmiston get along?"

"Why, they get along fine." She took a short step toward me. "What is all this, anyhow?"

I smiled, trying to keep it friendly. "I think things will go a lot better if you let me ask the questions, Mrs. Ogden. . . . Can you think of any reason your husband and Mr. Edmiston might have had for an argument this afternoon?"

"An argument? Oh, for heaven's sake! They have arguments all the time. They love to argue. Why, one night they spent four straight hours arguing about a hound-handled pitcher."

"They're good friends?"

"Of course. Did you think they weren't?"

"This is just a routine question, but I have to ask it. Did your husband and Edmiston ever have any trouble over you?"

She stepped back from me as suddenly as if I'd tried to strike her. "Certainly not!" Her face had paled perceptibly. "Carl Edmiston is more than twice my age. Of all the insulting, miserable things to say!"

"Were you in the Edmiston shop an hour or so ago?"

She was still glaring at me. "Yes, I was."

"Mind telling me why?"

"Not at all. Carl and I were talking about the inventory."

"Inventory?"

"Yes. Jeff — that's my husband — and I are buying Mr. Edmiston out, you know."

"No, I wasn't aware of that."

"Well, we are. I talked to him a little while, but I'm a long way from being expert in certain lines,

and I came back to get Jeff. One of us has to stay in the shop at all times, of course, and so Jeff went up to talk to Carl and I stayed here."

"Where is your husband now, Mrs. Ogden?"

"He's with our lawyer. Or at least I assume he is. He said he was going there, as soon as he straightened things out with Carl."

I got out my notebook again. "Where's your lawyer's office?"

The tip of her tongue came out to moisten her lips and she stared at me fixedly while her eyes slowly widened. She was making a tremendous effort to hide it, but I could sense the apprehension that was building inside her. "I demand to know what this is all about," she said. "I demand to. After all, I help pay your salary."

"I realize that," I said. "And I don't like the way we have to go about things much more than you do, Mrs. Ogden. But I don't make the rules."

"You cops are all the same. Every one of you. Something ought to be done about it. The taxpayers ought to get together and . . ."

"You mind giving me the address?" I asked patiently.

"Oh, to hell with you!" She turned away angrily. "He's in the Webber Building. His name's Bert Mandel. The Webber Building is straight up the street, on Fifty-second. Even a detective could find it."

I walked to the door, unlocked it,

then turned to glance back at the girl. She was already on her way toward the telephone table against the far wall. I stepped out on the sidewalk, then paused for a moment while I debated whether to drive up to the Webber Building, or walk. I decided I'd make better time walking.

Jeff Ogden turned out to be a tall, block-shouldered man with sandy, crew-cut hair, horn-rimmed glasses, and almost no chin at all. It was obvious that his wife had called to warn him of my visit, but he didn't seem concerned about it. Neither did his lawyer, Mandel, when I said I'd have to talk to Ogden in private.

Ogden and I left Mandel's office, walked along the corridor to the window that opened on Third Avenue, and lighted cigarettes.

My preliminary questions elicited the same information his wife had given me, and then I asked, "Did you have an argument with Mr. Edmiston just before you left his shop this afternoon?"

He took a deep drag on his cigarette and let the smoke dribble slowly through his nose while he stared at me unblinkingly through the thick lenses of his glasses. "Whatever's happened must be very serious." He made it a question.

I nodded.

"I don't suppose it would do any good to ask you exactly what I'm suspected of?"

"I didn't say you were suspected of anything, Mr. Ogden."

He smiled coldly. "No. You didn't, did you?" He shrugged. "Well, Carl Edmiston and I argue quite frequently. But never about anything except antiques. Actually, we're very good friends, and have been for years."

"You still haven't answered my question," I said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be evasive. Yes, we had an argument today. But it was a friendly one, just the way all our arguments are. Today we were arguing about Wedgwood and jasperware. Not about our own, you understand. We were discussing some pieces we saw in an exhibition last week."

"Do you and Mr. Edmiston usually find it necessary to go into privacy to talk about things like that?"

"What do you mean?"

"I understand you and he had your talk in his back room."

"Oh. No, we went back there to talk about my buying his stock."

"Why the back room?"

"Because we're keeping the transaction to ourselves. That is, we wanted to. Carl Edmiston and my wife and I are the only ones who knew anything about it — up till now."

"Is that the usual thing in your business — to keep such deals secret?"

He shook his head. "No. But Carl wanted it that way. He insisted on it. That's why he took me into the

back room. He didn't want anyone to overhear us talking about it."

"I see. Is Mr. Edmiston's business failing?"

Ogden laughed softly. "Far from it. He's one of the most successful men in the field — and one of the most respected."

"Why does he want to sell out, then?"

"Maybe you'd better talk to him about that."

"Perhaps I will. Right now, though, I'm talking to you."

He dropped his cigarette to the floor and ground it out slowly with his heel. "So you are," he said at last. "Well, Carl wants to get married and retire. He wants to travel and enjoy life, you might say."

"Is this coming marriage a secret, too?"

"I'm sure he'd like for it to be. He confided in my wife and me, but he made us swear to keep it quiet."

"Who's the woman?"

"It's a girl, really. Her name's Cathy Martin."

"Where can I find her?"

"I really don't know. I met her once, and I know she works in an office over on the west side, but I don't know just where."

I nodded. "I guess that about does it, Mr. Ogden. Thanks very much."

He didn't say anything, but his half smile told me what he was thinking about me, and probably about cops in general.

I took the elevator downstairs and

walked back to Carl Edmiston's antique shop.

Walt Logan started toward me the moment I stepped inside the door.

"These tech boys are getting too good," he said wryly. "Pretty soon guys like you and me will be out of a job."

"Why so?"

"Go talk to them, and you'll find out. They can tell you better than I can."

I walked over to the chief of the tech crew and asked him what he and his boys had come up with.

It was quite a bit.

After the tech chief had finished talking, I stood there for what must have been a full minute, mulling things over, and then I walked back to where Walt Logan was standing.

"Where's Miss Taylor?" I asked.

"I had one of the patrolmen take her home," he said. "She lives right across the street, in an apartment over that novelty store." He turned and pointed through the window to the building he meant. "There."

Ruth Taylor was wearing a thick white robe that covered her from neck to ankles. She'd taken down her dark hair, and now it hung below her shoulders. She was completely without makeup, and her age was clearly apparent. I couldn't help but think of how beautiful she

must have been when she first came to work for Carl Edmiston, fifteen years ago.

"I didn't expect to see you again so soon," she said.

"There've been a few developments," I said. "May I come in?"

"Surely." She stepped back to let me into the apartment, then closed the door and motioned me to a seat on the sofa. I sat down and she sat down in a deep leather chair across from me.

"You say there've been new developments?" she asked.

I nodded. "We have a mobile laboratory, Miss Taylor. Our techs have been putting it to pretty good use downstairs."

"Oh?"

"Yes. For instance, they've found out that the lug was broken off that flatiron some time ago. At least a week ago, they say."

She frowned at me questioningly. "But it wasn't. I told you I looked at it just a few minutes before Mr. Edmiston was murdered . . . was killed. It was perfectly all right."

I shook my head. "Any metal corrodes, Miss Taylor. Even gold, though it's a very slow process. With cast-iron, it's a different story. The techs have found that oxidation of the metal exposed by that broken lug has been going on for at least a week. They have ways of measuring such things—within certain limits, of course."

She shook her head uncomprehendingly. "But officer—if that

lug had been broken off, no one could have picked the iron up at all. I mean, not as a unit. The top part would have come away from the bottom."

"That's the point, Miss Taylor. That's it, exactly."

"I just don't follow you at all."

"The iron wasn't, as you say, picked up as a unit. That's what threw my partner and me. We assumed someone had grabbed the whole thing up, hit Mr. Edmiston in the back of the head with it, then dropped it to the floor and got out of there. We thought the lug was broken off when the iron hit the floor, which would account for the top and bottom coming apart."

"Isn't that what happened?"

"No. Mr. Edmiston was struck with the bottom part — the hollow shell — which is comparatively light. Then the shell was put on the floor and the top part and the broken lug put down near it, to give the impression that the iron had broken apart when it dropped." I paused. "But the iron wasn't dropped to the floor at all."

"I told you I heard it!"

"You couldn't have, Miss Taylor. A thirty-two pound iron would have left a sizable dent in the floor. There's no dent."

"Then it was Mr. Edmiston's body I heard fall."

"Think about it for a moment. A falling body, in a case like this, makes almost no sound at all. You might have heard a very soft thud

upstairs, but nothing at all like the sound the flatiron would have made."

She stared at me, biting at her lip, her eyes suddenly moist and very round.

"You made a point of telling me that a heavy iron like that couldn't have been wielded by the average woman, and you were right. But it would be very easy for the average woman to swing that hollow bottom shell." And there's one more thing — something that puzzled me when you told me about it. You said that Mr. Edmiston called out, 'Oh! Oh, don't!' "

"He did!"

I shook my head. "He didn't cry out at all. He was struck from behind. He might have called out something if he'd been facing the person who was going to kill him — but in that case he would have taken the blow to the front or the side of his head, not the back."

A full minute went by while we sat and looked at one another. And slowly, very slowly, her face came apart and the dammed-up tears finally broke loose and crawled unnoticed down her cheeks. Outside, the traffic sounds on Third Avenue seemed to grow louder, and from somewhere on the East River a tug-boat hooted.

"Why?" I asked softly.

She spoke as if to herself, as if I weren't there at all. "It takes time for wine to turn to vinegar," she said, almost inaudibly. "We were in love for so many years, and then he

began to grow tired of me. The years kept going by somehow, and I kept waiting. And even when I knew he never meant to marry me I was content just to be around him . . . to work with him every day." She shook her head incredulously. "It doesn't seem possible . . . fifteen years. When he started seeing other women, I didn't mind too much, because I was always sure he'd come back to me. And then, after I knew all hope was gone, I still hung on. I started living for the shop, for my work. For years I lived like that. Then he met Cathy Martin, and I knew he'd finally found the one for him. I

knew he meant to marry her. . . ."

I got to my feet. "Maybe you'd better get dressed now, Miss Taylor."

She nodded slowly. "It's strange . . . but I'm not afraid. I think I understand something now. I think that when I killed Carl I knew that sooner or later I'd be caught. It — it was a kind of suicide. I think that's what I meant to do all along — kill Carl, and then be killed myself for doing it."

She got to her feet slowly, as if she were very, very tired. "I shouldn't have killed him. It was only myself I wanted to kill, only myself, all along."



WATCH FOR . . .

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hunt*, on your newsstands soon!

The Big Day

The plan was perfect. Nothing could go wrong. In just a little while the three men would have five hundred thousand dollars.

BY RICHARD MARSTEN

"FRIDAY is our big day," the girl said. She drained the remains of her Manhattan, and then fished for the cherry at the bottom of the glass. Anson Grubb watched her, no sign of interest on his face.

The girl popped the cherry into her mouth and then touched her fingers lightly to the napkin in her lap. The gesture was a completely feminine one, turned gross and somehow ugly by the girl herself. She was a big girl, her hair inexpertly tinted blonde, her lipstick badly applied. Anson had never liked cheap merchandise, and he winced



inwardly as the girl munched on the cherry, her mouth working like a garbage disposal unit.

"The first and the fifteenth," the girl said around the shredded remnants of the cherry, "and Friday is the fifteenth."

"Pay day, huh?" Anson asked, sipping at his scotch, apparently bored with all this shop talk, but with his ears keyed to every syllable that came from her mouth.

"The steel mill and the airplane factory both," she said, nodding. "Can't we have another round, Anse?"

"Sure," Anson said. He signaled the waiter and then added, "Well, it's only twice a month, so that isn't too bad."

"That twice-a-month is enough to break our backs, Anse," the girl said, impatiently looking over her shoulder for the waiter. "On those pay days, we must handle close to \$500,000, cashing checks for the plants."

"That right?" Anson said.

"Sure. You'd never think our little bank handled so much money, would you?" The girl gave a pleased little wiggle. "We don't, usually, except on the first and the fifteenth."

"That's when the plants send over their payrolls, huh?" Anson asked. The waiter appeared at his elbow. "Two of the same, please," he said. The waiter nodded and silently vanished.

"This is a nice place," the girl said.

"I figured you needed a little relaxation," Anson said. "Enjoy yourself before the mad rush on Friday, you know."

"God, when I think of it," the girl said. "It's enough to drive you nuts."

"I can imagine," Anson said. "First those payrolls arriving early in the morning, and then the employees coming to cash their checks later in the day. That must be very trying."

"Well, the payrolls don't come on Friday," the girl said. The waiter reappeared, depositing their drinks on the table. The girl lifted her Manhattan, said, "Here's how," and drank.

"Oh, they don't come on Friday?" Anson said.

"No, they'll reach us Thursday afternoon."

"Well, that's sensible, at least," Anson said. He paused and lifted his drink. "Probably after you close those big bronze doors to the public, huh?"

"No, we don't close until three. The payrolls get there at about two."

"Oh, that's good. Then the payrolls are safe in the vault before three."

"Oh, sure. We've got a good vault."

"I'll bet you do. Do you want to dance, honey?"

"I'd love to," the girl said. She shoved her chair back with all the grace of a bus laboring uphill. She went into Anson's arms, and he

maneuvered her onto the floor skillfully, feeling the roll of fat under his fingers, his mouth curled into a distasteful smile over her shoulder.

"Yep," the girl said, "Friday is our big day."

No, Anson thought. *Thursday* is our big day.

2.

Jeremy Thorpe stood at the far end of the counter, the ball point pen in his hand. He took out his pass book, opened it before him, and then drew a deposit slip from one of the cubbyholes beneath the counter. He flipped the deposit slip over so that he could write on the blank yellow surface, and then he knotted his brow as if he were trying to work out a tricky problem in arithmetic.

He drew a large rectangle on the back of the deposit slip. On the North side of the rectangle, he drew two lines which intersected the side, and between the lines he scribbled the word "doors." In the right hand corner of the rectangle, he drew a small square resembling a desk, and he labelled it "mgr." Across the entire South side of the rectangle, opposite his "doors," he drew a line representing the half-wall dividing the tellers' cages from the remainder of the bank. He jotted four lines onto this to show the approximate position of the cages, and another line to indicate the locked doorway that led to the back

of the bank and the vault. In the left-hand corner of his plan, the East and North sides intersected in a right angle which he labeled "Counter."

He folded the deposit slip in half, slipped it into his coat pocket, took a new deposit slip from the cubbyhole, and filled it in for a deposit of five dollars. In the space that asked for his name, he did not write Jeremy Thorpe. He carefully lettered in the words, "Arthur Samuels." He brought the deposit slip and a five dollar bill to one of the cages, waiting behind a small man in a dark suit.

This was the third time he'd been inside the bank. He'd opened an account close to a month ago with fifty dollars. He'd added twenty dollars to it last week. He was adding five dollars to it now. He'd used different tellers for each deposit. The teller who took his pass book and money now had never seen Jeremy Thorpe before, and he certainly didn't know his name wasn't really Arthur Samuels. The teller stamped the book, put the money and deposit slip into his drawer, and handed the book back to Jeremy. Jeremy put the pass book into its protective case, and then walked directly to the doors, glancing once at the manager's desk which was on his left behind a short wooden railing. The big bronze doors were folded back against the wall, and the uniformed bank guard was chatting with a white-haired woman. Jeremy pushed open one of the glass doors

and walked down the steps into the sunshine.

This was Tuesday.

3.

From the soda fountain across the way from the bank, Carl Semmer could see the bank very clearly. There was a driveway to the right of the bank, and a door was at the end of that driveway, and the payroll trucks would roll up that driveway on Thursday. The guards would step out and enter through the door at the end of the driveway, and the payrolls for American Steel and Tartogue Aircraft would be carried back to the vault, awaiting the demands of the employee's checks next day. He had sat at the soda fountain counter on two payroll delivery days thus far. The American Steel payroll had arrived in an armored car bearing the shield of International Armored Car Corp. on both those days. On the fourteenth of last month, it had arrived at 2:01 P.M. On the thirty-first of last month, it had arrived at 2:07 P.M. On both occasions, it had taken the guards approximately six minutes to deliver the payroll and back the truck out into the street. They had then turned left around the corner and been out of sight before an additional minute had expired.

On the fourteenth, the Safeguard Company's truck bearing the second payroll had arrived at 2:10, several minutes after the first truck de-

parted. On the thirty-first, the Safeguard Company's truck arrived while the first truck was still in the driveway. It waited in front of the A&P alongside the bank's driveway, and when the first truck swung out into the street and around the corner, it pulled up to the rear door at 2:15.

On both occasions, each truck was gone and out of sight by 2:22 P.M. Carl had watched these operations with careful scrutiny. He was now watching an equally important operation.

The big clock on the outside wall of the bank read 2:59. He glanced at his own wrist watch to check the time, and then his eyes moved to the front steps where he saw Anson Grubb starting for the doors. Anson entered the glass doors and moved into the bank. Carl's eyes fled to the clock again. The big hand was moving — slowly, almost imperceptibly. Three o'clock.

Jeremy Thorpe started up the front steps of the bank. From behind the glass doors, the uniformed guard shook his head, smiled a sad smile at Jeremy, and then began closing the big bronze doors. Jeremy snapped his fingers, turned, and walked down the steps again and turned left toward the A&P. Carl studied his watch. It took thirty seconds to close the big bronze doors.

He kept watching the front of the bank. At 3:05, one of the bronze doors opened, and an old lady started down the steps. The door closed

behind her. At 3:07, the door opened again, and two more people left the bank. At 3:10, four people left. At 3:17, two people left. At 3:21, Anson Grubb left the bank. Carl knew he would be the last person to leave. He paid for his coffee and went back to the furnished room at the other end of town.

This was Wednesday.

4.

"The payroll trucks should be gone by 2:25," Anson said that night. "We'll give ourselves leeway and say they'll be gone by 2:30. Add another five minutes to that in case there are any foul-ups inside the bank, and we can figure the dough'll be safe in the vault by 2:35."

He scratched his chin thoughtfully. He was a tall man with wild black hair. His eyes were blue, and his nose was long and thin. He wore an immaculate blue suit, and a black homburg rested on the chair beside him. One knee was raised as he leaned onto the chair, the trouser leg pulled back in a crease-preserving manner.

"Where's the plan, Jerry?" he said.

Jeremy Thorpe rose and walked to the dresser. He opened the top drawer and removed an 8x11 enlargement of the plan he'd sketched onto the deposit slip. He brought this to the table, put it in the center under the hanging light bulb and said, "I'm no Michelangelo."

The other men studied the plan once more. They had seen it often enough since Jeremy had drawn it up, but they studied it again, coupling it with their own memories of what they'd seen inside the bank, giving the two-dimensional drawing a three-dimensional reality.

"What do you think?" Anson said.

"Looks good," Carl answered. He was a short man with a pug nose and bad teeth. He was smoking now, and the grey smoke of his cigarette drifted up past the cooler grey of his eyes. He wore his brown hair in a crew cut.

"Jerry?"

"I like it," Jeremy said. He blinked his eyes. Now that the time was close, he was getting a little nervous. The nervousness showed in his pale features. He tweaked his feminine nose, and his lids blinked again, like short flesh curtains spasmodically closing and opening over his brown eyes.

"Only two of us are going in, you understand that, don't you?" Anson said.

Carl nodded.

"Jerry?"

"I understand."

"You think we can knock it over with just two inside?" Carl asked. "Maybe we all ought to go in."

"We can do it," Anson said.

"There's just one weak spot in the plan," Jeremy said, blinking.

"What's that?"

"The last guy to leave."

"How do you figure that to be a weak spot?"

"Suppose the timing is off? What happens then?"

"The timing won't be off," Anson said. "Look, you want me to run through this again?"

"Yeah, I'd feel better if you did," Jeremy said.

"Okay. The trucks are gone by 2:30, we're figuring. The dough is in the vault by 2:35. Carl is across the street in the soda fountain, watching all the time. If anything happens to delay the trucks, he gives us a buzz before we leave here, and we postpone the thing to the first of next month. So there's no chance of a slip-up there, right?"

"Right," Jeremy said.

"Okay. At 2:45, assuming we get no call from Carl, you and I leave here. It takes us five minutes to drive from here to the parking lot on Main and West Davis. That's a public parking lot, so we don't have to worry about attendants or anything. We just pull the car in, and leave it. Time: 2:50. We walk to the bank. It takes only four minutes to walk to the bank, we've timed that a dozen times already. That would put us in the bank at 2:54, but that's a little too early, so we dally a bit, getting to the bank at 2:58. We've entered as late as 2:59 with no trouble from the guard at the door, so there shouldn't be any trouble at 2:58. I go straight to the manager's desk. At three o'clock, four things are going to happen."

"Go ahead," Jeremy said.

"One: the bank guard is going to close those big bronze doors so nobody else can come into the bank."

"Yeah."

"Two: you're going over to the bank guard, Jerry. You're telling him a holdup is in progress, and that he is to behave normally, letting no one into the bank and letting any one out who wants to go out. You got that?"

"Yes."

"Three: I'm going to sit down at the manager's desk and tell him I have a gun in my pocket and I want him to take me back to the vault. Four: Carl leaves the soda fountain and heads for the parking lot the second he sees the bronze doors closing."

"Well, it's okay so far," Jeremy said. "It's what comes later that bothers me."

"This is perfect," Anson said. "There's nothing to worry about. The time is now 3:00 P.M. The doors are closed, you and I are inside the bank, Carl is on his way to the car. There are only two people inside that bank who know there's a holdup going on. And they're the only two people who'll know about it until it's all over and we're gone. It takes Carl four minutes to walk to the car. Time: 3:04. By 3:04, the bank manager and I will have left his desk, gone through the locked door to the right of the teller's cages, and be at the door to the

vault. You're still at the entrance with the bank guard, Jerry. Some people will be leaving, but that's all right. We let them go. By 3:05, the vault door is open, and the manager and I are inside."

"The light on the corner of Main and West Davis turns red at 3:06," Carl said. "It's a one-minute light, turning green again at 3:07. It takes two minutes to drive from that corner to the bank driveway. Time: 3:09."

"I've been in the vault for four minutes already," Anson said. "I figure I can clean it out in six minutes. We've practiced stuffing that suitcase already, and I've always done it in less than five. But we'll figure six minutes to play it safe. In other words, at 3:11 I'm ready to leave the vault with the dough, and Carl is parked in the driveway at the rear door."

"And I'm still with the bank guard," Jeremy said.

"Correct," Anson replied. "At 3:11, I leave the vault and close the door. The manager is still inside. If he starts yelling, no one's going to hear him through that thick steel. So we don't have to worry about the manager after 3:11. I walk to my left and to the rear door. It's approximately ten feet to that door. I open it, step into the rear of the car, and Carl pulls out of the driveway. It shouldn't take us longer than a minute to clear the driveway and turn toward the front of the bank. We'll play it safe. Give us two

minutes from the time I leave the vault to the time the car will be waiting for you at the front of the bank, Jerry. In other words: 3:13."

"That's the part that bothers me," Jeremy said. "I don't like leaving last."

"There's nothing to worry about," Anson said. "At 3:13 by the bank's clock, you tell the guard to open the door. You walk out and down to the car. It'll take you twenty seconds to cross the sidewalk to the car. It'll take the guard at least thirty seconds to get over his shock and open those doors again. That gives us a ten-second start. By that time, we're around the corner and away. We'll be on the highway before the cops even know about this. The guard'll probably rush out and start yelling and then remember he ought to pull the alarm. That's all the lead we'll need."

"I don't like leaving last," Jeremy said.

"Why not? I'm the only one who'll be carrying any money," Anson said. "When you leave, you'll look just like any other depositor who got caught inside when the doors closed. You're not allowed to park in front of the bank, which means there'll be a space for our car guaranteed. We'll be in it just as you come out of the bank. Believe me, we can't miss."

"I hope so," Jeremy said, blinking.

On Thursday, the fourteenth, the sun rose over the town and splashed the streets with gold. There was a

pale blue sky behind the sun, and the natives of the town talked about Spring coming early this year. It was a warm sun, and it dispelled harsh thoughts of Winter, and the people of the town responded to the sun and quickened their steps, and walked with the collars of their coats open, walked with their heads high. It was good to be alive on a day like this. The people in the bank, the tellers, the clerks, the manager, the guard looked through the glass entrance doors and up at the high windows on the walls, seeing the golden splash of the sun and wishing for their lunch hours so they could get outside and soak up some fresh air.

5.

The three men ate lunch in a diner. They did not sit together. They did not talk to each other. They ate their lunches quietly and then separately went back to their furnished room to prepare for the business that lay ahead of them.

Anson was in a holiday mood. He took the theatrical makeup kit from the bottom drawer of the dresser, and then he went to the closet for the suitcase bearing the wigs, and there was a perky spring in his step, and a smile on his face.

"It isn't enough to be merely unrecognizable," Anson said, like a professor delivering a lecture to his students. "To begin with, we couldn't wear masks because we're

allegedly just customers entering the bank. We have to look like normal, everyday people." He tapped the makeup kit. "That's the beauty of this."

"I'll feel strange," Jeremy said.

"Of course you are," Anson replied. "But when the time comes for descriptions, you'll feel a whole lot better. Come on, let's get started."

They began with the spirit gum. Carl owned a pug nose, but he sat before the mirror and diligently wadded spirit gum onto it until the nose took a definite downward curve. Jeremy used a heavy hand with the gum, adding to his own slender, feminine nose until the nose was gross and wide. Anson built a hook into the center of his nose, so that the nose appeared to have been broken at one time. They tinted the spirit gum to match the color of their complexions, and then they started with the theatrical hair. Carefully, painstakingly, they snipped patches of hair from the long strands they held in their hands. Carl built up his eyebrows so that they were shaggy and unkempt. Anson, bit by careful bit, built a red moustache under his false broken nose. Jeremy put a hairline moustache under his.

They powdered their noses to take the shine of the makeup off them, and then they took the wigs out of the suitcase. Anson put the red wig over his own wild black hair. Jeremy, in character with the thin moustache, donned a black wig

and then plastered the hair down with petroleum jelly. Carl put on a shaggy wig which matched his eyebrows. They glued the wigs tight at their temples, combing the hair so that it fell naturally. The time was 1:30.

At 1:32, the International Armored Car Corp. truck pulled up at the offices of American Steel and two armed guards transported the payroll into the steel-plated truck. At 1:35, the truck from the Safe-guard Company arrived at Tartogue Aircraft to pick up its payroll load.

At 1:37, Anson Grubb said, "You'd better hurry, Carl."

"I'm hurrying," Carl answered. He was wearing a pale yellow sports shirt, and he stood before the mirror now, knotting a tie. He did not put either a sports jacket or a suit jacket over the shirt. He wore, instead, a red plaid lumberjacket. The other men would follow the same sartorial plan. Over the lumberjackets would go overcoats. Once they were in the car and away from the bank after the holdup, the overcoats, the wigs, the false hair and the built-up noses, the neckties, all would be dumped into a suitcase in the back seat of the car. Anyone who'd seen them in the bank would remember three men in overcoats, wearing neckties. Once they left that bank, their physical appearances would be completely changed. The three men in the car would be wearing lumberjackets and sports shirts. They would be of different hair coloring than the men

who'd robbed the bank. Their faces would be different. They would all be cleanshaven, whereas the two men who'd robbed the bank had worn moustaches. Only the driver of the car — if anyone happened to see him — had sported a hairless face.

But the escape precautions did not end at this point. Three men traveling alone, no matter what their description, would certainly be suspect after a bank had been looted by three strangers. Two drop-off points had been marked along the escape route. Jeremy would be dropped off first, carrying the suitcase with the overcoats and the rest of the junk. He would run around to the back of the car and take off the phony plate which had been taped onto the car's original plate, in the event anyone had caught the license number as they'd driven from the bank.

Anson would be dropped off two miles later, carrying the suitcase with the money, and also carrying Carl's gun as well as his own.

If Carl were stopped after the two men had been dropped off, he'd be clean as a whistle. He was unarmed. There was no loot in the car. There was nothing in the car which could tie him to the holdup. There was no reason to assume he would be stopped, but if he were, he would be a workman in a lumberjacket, returning to the city after a hard day. A rendezvous point, some one thousand miles and two weeks away, had been arranged. It looked perfect.

"I'm going to enjoy this dough," Carl said.

"Mmmm," Anson said appreciatively.

"What will you do with it, Carl?" Jeremy asked, stepping close to the mirror and admiring his masquerade handiwork.

"Spend it," Carl said.

"On what?"

"Women."

"He's a ladies' man," Jeremy said to Anson.

"Damn right, I'm a ladies' man. There isn't anybody in the world who couldn't be a ladies' man with one-third of \$500,000."

"That's a mean hunk of cabbage," Anson said.

"I'm getting out of the country with my share," Jeremy said. "Down to Mexico."

"What the hell're you gonna do there?" Anson wanted to know.

"He'll open up a chain of houses."

"The hell I am. I'll just sit around in the sun and have myself a ball, that's all. Nothing to do but soak up sun for the rest of my life."

"I can't go to Mexico," Carl said.

"Why not?"

"I once cooled a Mexican cop. We were running some weed out of Tijuana, and he stepped in and began making noise."

"There are other places besides Tijuana," Anson said.

"Sure, but my face is in every police station in Mexico," Carl said.

"I've got no worries there," Jeremy said.

"Just so you stay out of Kansas City," Anson said.

"I'm not wanted in Kansas City."

"Not by the cops, no," Anson said.

"You talking about Harry Kale?"

"Harry Kale is who I'm talking about."

"Kale doesn't bother me," Jeremy said.

"No, huh?"

"No. He made up all that business. He invented all that statutory rape junk so he could get me out of K.C."

"He did, huh? That sounds screwy, considering it brought the bulls down around his ears."

"He made it all up."

"Well, just stay clear of Kansas City, and you're all right."

"I'm not going anywhere near K.C.," Jeremy said, "but not because Harry Kale scares me. He doesn't scare me at all."

"I once did a job for Harry," Anson said. "In the old days, when we were still running booze. He pays well."

"He doesn't pay the way this job is going to pay," Carl said.

"Nobody pays the way this job is going to pay."

"You think we should run through it again?" Jeremy asked.

"Sure," Anson said. "Once more before Carl leaves. We've still got a few minutes, haven't we?"

They ran through the job again, committing it to their separate memories, and then they synchronized

their watches with Anson's, which had been set with the bank's clock that morning.

At 1:50, Carl left the room.

6.

The man behind the soda fountain did not recognize him, and he considered that a good omen. He had been secretly afraid that his disguise could be penetrated, but the man behind the counter hadn't given him a second look. To complete the transition of character, and to completely disassociate himself from the Carl Semmer who'd sat at this same counter yesterday and ordered coffee, Carl ordered a cherry coke. He paid for the coke when he was served, eliminating any possible delay later when it would be time to leave for the car. He sat sipping his coke and watching the driveway across the street.

At 2:02, the International Armored Car Corp. truck arrived. He watched the guards as they entered the rear door with the American Steel payroll. At 2:08, they entered the truck, backed it out of the driveway, and drove off. At 2:10, the second armored car appeared. They finished their delivery, and drove off at 2:16. Carl glanced at his watch, checking it against the time on the bank clock, and then relaxed.

"Let me have a newspaper," he said to the man behind the counter.

The man gave him a paper, and Carl paid for it, and then began

reading it, glancing across the street every few minutes. Not many people were going into the bank. That was good. Everything was running very smoothly. He was tempted to call Anson and Jeremy, tell them the loot was there, just waiting to be picked up, but he didn't want to throw them into a panic. He bided his time instead, aware of the crawling hands of the clock. At 2:45, he knew Anson and Jeremy were leaving the room. Carl waited, folding his newspaper, sipping at his coke.

At 2:57, he saw them coming down the street. He rose and walked to the plate glass door, looking out.

"Hey, mister," the man behind the counter said.

Carl whirled. "What?"

"You forgot your newspaper."

"Thanks, you can keep it."

He watched Anson and Jeremy as they walked past the A&P, past the bank driveway, up the flat steps leading to the entrance doors. The bank guard smiled as they entered the bank. The clock above the doors read 2:58. Everything was moving according to schedule. At three P.M., the guard closed the big bronze doors. Carl walked out of the shop, turned right, and headed for the parking lot and the waiting automobile.

7.

"A holdup is in progress," Jeremy said to the bank guard.

"What?" the guard said as he

turned away from the doors. "What are you. . . ?"

"This is a gun in my pocket. Keep quiet and no one will get hurt. Open your mouth, and the whole place gets shot up."

The guard blinked his eyes and then looked down to the menacing bulge in Jeremy's pocket. He was tempted for a moment to begin yelling, and then his eyes took in the slicked-down hair and the pencil-thin moustache, and something warned him to keep his silence. This man was a killer.

"Don't let anyone else in," Jeremy said. "If anyone wants to go out, let them out. Act the way you always do. No funny business. We'll just stand here and chat as if nothing's happening. Have you got that?"

The bank guard nodded.

"Good afternoon, sir," the bank manager said to Anson. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm carrying a gun," Anson whispered, "and I know how to use it. Get up from that desk and walk back to the vault with me. If anyone looks at you curiously, smile back at them. When we get to the vault, you'll open the door, and we'll go in together. If you so much as look crooked at anybody, you're a dead man. You understand?"

"I . . . understand," the manager said. He estimated the distance between his foot and the alarm

buzzer set in the floor under his desk, and then he estimated the distance between his heart and the gun the redheaded, moustached man held in his pocket. "I . . . I'll do what you say," he murmured, and he rose from the desk. Anson walked with him to the locked door. The manager signaled to the teller nearest the door, and the teller pushed a button and the door clicked open. The manager and Anson walked back to the vault door. One of the tellers turned to look at the manager, but he smiled and nodded, and the teller went back to his work.

"Open it," Anson whispered.

The manager nodded weakly and began twisting the dials in the face of the huge steel door.

At 3:05, he swung back the door, and he and Anson stepped into the vault. The bank guard, the only other member of the bank's staff who knew that the bank was being held up, watched the manager and the redheaded man enter the vault, and he sighed deeply, and then smiled as he let a customer out of the bank.

8.

Carl sat at the wheel of the car and glanced at his watch.

3:06.

He looked up at the light on the corner of Main and West Davis, and then he watched the sweep hand of his watch as it swung through sixty seconds. At 3:07, the

light changed to green and Carl turned the corner and headed for the bank driveway at the end of the street.

In four minutes, Anson would be coming out of that door with \$500,000 worth of cabbage. In six minutes, Jeremy would be leaving the front of the bank. They'd be gone before anybody inside had sense enough to know what had hit them.

He drove leisurely down the street. There was a line of traffic on the other side of the two-lane street, but there was only one car behind him. He could see the A&P ahead, the driveway on its left. He threw the directional signal shaft up, saw the little light on the dashboard begin blinking intermittently as he prepared for his right turn. He saw the A&P truck then.

The truck had just pulled into the area in front of the driveway, ready to back into a space in front of the supermarket. Anson cursed silently and jammed on the brakes. The truck driver was taking all his damn sweet time, maneuvering the big lumbering machine into position against the curb, his nose jutting out so that he blocked the entrance to the driveway.

Carl looked at his watch. 3:09. He had two minutes to get that damned car into the driveway. The man in the car behind him began honking his horn.

"Shut up, you damn fool," Carl said vehemently, his voice loud in the silence of his closed car.

It suddenly occurred to Carl that the man behind him was attracting attention. And if anyone looked at Carl's car, they'd automatically figure he was getting ready to turn into the driveway. Where else could he be going? Why else was he waiting for the truck to back up in front of the supermarket?

He suddenly stepped on the gas, driving to the corner and making a U-turn against the stream of on-coming traffic. He drove down the street again, signaled for a left turn, and headed for the driveway as the truck backed into position in front of the supermarket. It was almost 3:11. Anson would be coming out of that rear door in a few seconds.

"Well, for Christ's sake, move it up a little," he heard the voice at the end of the driveway say.

"Move it where, you damn fool!" a second voice answered. "Can't you see the driveway?"

"The hell with the driveway. You're backed up too close to this car. I can't get your doors open."

"Oh, hell!" Carl heard the second voice reply, and then his heart lurched into his throat when he heard the truck's motor whine into action again.

9.

Anson stuffed the suitcase rapidly. Bills, more bills than he'd seen in his life. Crisp and green, and smelling of big cars and dames and liquor and anything a man wanted.

"Get over there in the corner," he said to the manager.

The manager moved swiftly. Anson kept piling the stacked and bound bills into the suitcase. His hands moved rapidly, the gun dangling on his forefinger from its trigger-guard. He slammed the suitcase shut and glanced at his watch. 3:10.

"Don't start yelling," he said to the manager. "Now that I've got the dough, I'm more likely to kill for it."

He stepped quickly to the vault door, put the gun into his coat pocket, slammed the door and whirled the dials, and then walked rapidly to the rear door of the bank, not turning to look behind him.

Jeremy, at the entrance doors, saw Anson come out of the vault and head out of the building. He looked up at the clock on the wall over the tellers' cages. 3:11. Two minutes to go. Two minutes and he would be out of here.

10.

Anson stepped into the driveway, closed the door behind him, and reached for the rear door handle of the car. He opened the door, climbed into the back seat and said, "Go, Carl."

"Go where? There's a truck at the other end of the drive!"

Anson whirled on the seat. He spotted the truck, and he felt the sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"Back up. As far as you can go. I'll get rid of the truck."

"How? What can you. . . ?"

"I don't know! Move, you stupid cluck! Jerry's comin' out that front door in a minute and a half!"

Carl threw the car into reverse and backed down the driveway.

"More," Anson said.

"I can't go no more. We don't want to block the sidewalk."

"Okay." Anson was already opening the door. "I'll move the truck. As soon as you're clear, back into the street, and over to the front of the bank. I'll catch you."

"How will you. . . ?"

"Look alive!" Anson snapped, and then he left the car. He ran directly to the truck, around the front end, and then he climbed into the cab and threw the machine into reverse. He rammed his foot down onto the accelerator, and he felt the truck lurch backward, and he heard the screams behind him, and then he heard the sullen crunch of metal as the truck's doors struck the car parked behind. As he leaped out of the cab, he saw one of the bronze bank doors open, and Jeremy started down the steps, heading for the curb. Jeremy's face was pale, and his eyes popped wide when he saw the empty space at the curb. He looked back at the bronze doors, and then he wet his lips, his eyes blinking furiously. The car! Where the hell was the goddamn car!

Anson's feet struck the pavement, and he heard the car in the driveway

grind into action as Carl stepped on the gas. Jeremy was about to panic, he could see that.

"Jerry!" he yelled. "This way! Quick!"

Jeremy's eyes darted to the street. He saw Anson, and he began to run instantly, and at the same moment the bronze doors swung open and the bank guard shouted, "Stop, thief!"

Jeremy turned blindly, his gun leaping into his hand. He fired at the guard, his head turned, his body moving forward on churning legs.

Anson's eyes widened. "Jerry! For Christ's sake, watch . . ."

The car lunged out of the driveway, catching Jeremy on the run. Jeremy screamed, and the gun in his hand bucked as his finger closed around the trigger again, and then the car hurled him to the pavement, and he screamed again when the wheels crushed his body flat, and then he screamed no more.

The bank guard was down the steps now, his gun in his hand. Anson reached the car and pulled open the rear door. The guard sighted carefully, and then he squeezed the trigger as Anson entered the car. The shots erupted into the quiet of the small street. Two spurts of dust rose on Anson's back, and then the dust gave way before two rivers of blood. He fell backward, clinging to the center post of the car as it wheeled into the street and backed for its turn. He lost his grip then, toppling out of the car to lay face down on the pavement as the blood ran off his back.

The money, Carl thought. The money is still in the car. The money, the money, and then the windshield was shattering and he had a second to realize those holes were bullet holes before his face crumbled and he lurched forward onto the wheel.

The big day was over.

Tomorrow was payday.

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Mass Production

Alfred Leonard Cline was a guy who really got away with murder. As a matter of fact, he may have gotten away with eight murders.

*A True Crime Story Based
On Actual Case Files*

BY ANDREW J. BURRIS

WHEN MARTIN FRAME, still feeling slightly woozy, walked into the office of the Los Angeles District Attorney that day in October, 1933, he didn't attract

much attention. The story he told was interesting, and it seemed fairly simple to follow up, but it was really nothing special. At first, anyhow, it didn't look very special.

Frame told the district attorney that he'd been on a trip to nearby Imperial Valley with a friend of his, Alfred Leonard Cline, a few days before. He'd taken some buttermilk while there, and had become ill. Later he fainted — and when he recovered, Cline was gone, and \$250 which Frame had cautiously sewed into the lining of his clothing was gone with him. Frame's first stop was a doctor, who told him he was suffering from the after-effects of narcotics poisoning. His second stop was the police station.

It didn't take long to pick up Cline. On October 21st, he was arrested. He was a small, mild-mannered guy whose past activities seemed to include nothing more shocking than a bit of choir-singing at a parish church. He was forty-five years old, and he lived in a palatial house in Glendale.

There was one other fact. Cline's wife, and his brother-in-law had recently died.

That was the fact that interested Blayney Matthews, a Special Investigator attached to the DA's office. On nothing more than a hunch, a feeling that Cline didn't look quite right to him, Matthews got permission to exhume the bodies. They'd both been reported as dead of heart attacks; a physician had signed the death certificate in each case, and everything was nice and legal. But Matthews still had his hunch.

When the bodies had been re-

examined, though, there wasn't much more on which to base a hunch. No traces of poison were found in the systems of either Cline's wife, Bessie Ann, or his brother-in-law, Brandt. True, some poisons aren't detectable after a few days, and Brandt had been dead since March; Bessie Ann since September. And, also true, luminol is one such poison. Martin Frame was ill from the after-effects of luminol poisoning. And in Cline's house the police found several bottles of luminol.

It was easy enough to get Cline arraigned, tried and convicted for robbery in the case of Martin Frame. But Matthews wasn't satisfied with that. The further he dug into Cline's past, the more he came up with.

First of all, Cline had a police record. In 1929 he'd been convicted of forgery, when the police discovered his scheme to forge a widow's name to a will and inherit three million dollars when she died. He was given only a short term, though, and he was out of jail a free man late in 1931, just in time to meet the Reverend E. F. Jones, a traveling evangelist from London. He and Rev. Jones grew friendly, and when the latter decided to take a car trip through California, Cline went along. Halfway through the trip, Jones made a will which named Cline sole heir to Jones' \$11,000 estate. And two days later Jones was dead. The death certificate named heart failure as the cause of death, and Cline collected.

Jones was cremated. Perhaps Cline hadn't wanted to take any chances.

But it was still "perhaps." There wasn't a shred of evidence. Matthews dug deeper.

How about Mrs. Carrie May Porter, who'd died of heart trouble in Reno in late 1931? The hotel register stated that a Mr. A. L. Cline, her nephew, occupied the adjoining room. That time, Cline took possession of the \$20,000 in jewelry and securities which Mrs. Porter was carrying. He then had her body transported to San Francisco — for cremation, of course.

There were other cases, but they all had one thing in common. There wasn't a thing that Matthews could use to prove that Cline had ever even thought of murder. In the end, he was simply convicted of grand theft and associated charges, and given a five-to-fifteen-year sentence in Folsom.

The case was officially marked closed. Cline went to jail and served his time like a model prisoner. By 1945 he was up and around again, a free man. And in December of that year he was arrested in San Francisco.

This time he'd been forging the signature of his late wife. This wife was named Delora Krebs Cline, and since her death Cline had cashed several checks purportedly signed by her previously. He'd also inherited her fortune of \$250,000. Her body had been cremated.

So far, things followed the fa-

miliar pattern of forgery, death and cremation. But when the police research experts turned up the case of a Mrs. Isabelle Van Natta, things really began to get confused.

Miss Van Natta had been missing from her home since November 7th. She was an elderly widow. A letter found in her home linked her to Cline. And when the ashes that were all that remained of Delora Krebs Cline were examined, they seemed to be the ashes of Mrs. Van Natta instead.

Cline had stayed with a woman claiming to be Delora in Portland, Oregon, just a few days before the confusing death in December. Portland officials stated that the woman concerned there hadn't been Delora Krebs Cline, but probably Mrs. Van Natta. And finally, a physician in Dallas, Texas, identified a woman who'd died there in October, 1944, as the real Delora Krebs Cline.

That wasn't so confusing. Cline might have killed his wife in 1944, and then used Mrs. Van Natta as an accomplice to make out a new will allowing him to inherit. Then, the police figured, he could have killed Mrs. Van Natta, pretending she was Delora.

But where was the proof? It began to look as if Cline had come up with the perfect crime — in fact, a whole series of perfect crimes. Everybody thought he knew the answer. But nobody could prove a thing. Cline was still in jail for forgery — but that wasn't the big question.

In jail, he was just as mild and friendly as ever. One of the turnkeys remembers him as a nice guy. He was such a gentle soul — maybe it was all a mistake.

But the reports kept coming in. Jacksonville, Florida had a case where a man identified as Cline had registered in a motel as "F. L. Klein and wife" on October 22, 1943, soon after Cline's release from jail. The wife died on November 8th and was cremated.

Oakland, California told of Mrs. Elizabeth Hunt Lewis, an elderly widow who'd left with Cline in September 1943. The San Francisco District Attorney stated: "That's the woman who died in Jacksonville."

Cline said: "Prove it."

Mrs. Alice Carpenter died in Dallas, Texas, on October 17, 1944. She was cremated. Dallas officials wanted Cline, identified as her "business agent," who'd ordered the cremation.

But Dallas wasn't alone. Everybody wanted to try Cline by this time. Reno wanted to reopen the Carrie May Porter death. Los Angeles wanted to reopen the deaths of Bessie May Cline and her brother, Brandt. Jacksonville put in a bid.

San Francisco, where Cline was in jail, finally got the nod.

But he wasn't tried for murder. Under the law he couldn't be. Everybody was sure he was a killer, but nobody could prove it. San Francisco District Attorney Edmund Brown finally realized that it didn't make much difference, as long as they put Cline away for good. He brought charges on nine counts of forgery.

The trial was a spectacle. White-haired Alfred Leonard Cline (he was in his late fifties by this time) was mild-mannered, gentle and friendly to everyone, even the prosecuting attorney. His personality was turned on full blast.

It didn't do him any good, though. He was convicted on all nine counts and sentenced to a total of 126 years in prison. Judge Herbert Kaufman referred to him as "One-Man Crime, Incorporated."

Cline was sent off to prison. He knew he'd be there for life now. And maybe he felt a little disappointed. Here he'd gone and committed perhaps as many as eight perfect murders — and what did he have to show for it?

Nothing but a convict's number, after all.



Pickup

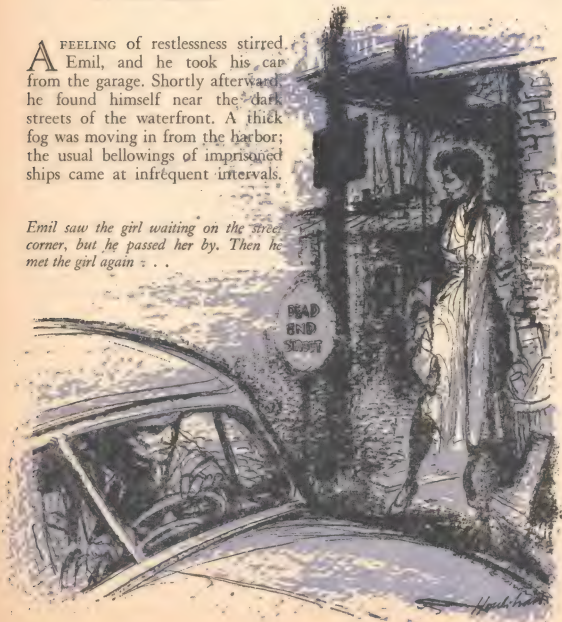
BY HAL ELLSON

A FEELING of restlessness stirred Emil, and he took his car from the garage. Shortly afterward he found himself near the dark streets of the waterfront. A thick fog was moving in from the harbor; the usual bellowings of imprisoned ships came at infrequent intervals.

Emil saw the girl waiting on the street corner, but he passed her by. Then he met the girl again . . .

Otherwise, no sounds, the streets singularly deserted.

Slowing to pass a corner, he noticed the girl leaning against a wall. No doubt young, though he couldn't see her face. Waiting for a bus, he thought; then he remembered that



the buses had been on strike for the past week. A pickup, he decided. But it was such a remote spot, and no one about. Blocks since he'd last seen any one.

A few seconds and she was out of sight, but that picture of her there against the wall remained in his mind to disturb him. And so, minutes later, he returned to find her gone, no sign of her anywhere, the street deserted, the fog thickening. Nothing gained, nothing lost, he thought, driving on again.

But he was still prey to his restlessness, a nameless inner turmoil making him grip the steering gear till his hands went white. Driving didn't help; it seemed to accelerate his tension and, at last, he determined to stop, leave the car and have a walk about.

Soon he left the car behind him. A strange neighborhood this, where he'd never been before. Intensely, morbidly silent but for those melancholy sounds which came from the harbor, the fog thickening, no one about, a distinct salt-smell in the air as if the sea had reached inland in some secret manner. Actually, he was only a block and a half from the waterfront.

He turned into a wide avenue now, shadowed by a ramp. Overhead an occasional car whirled past. The avenue was deserted, the lights of the street lamps fleeced with fog. Two blocks without meeting a soul, the stores locked for the night. Then he noticed the place, no more than

a hole in the wall, a candy store on the corner.

He needed cigarettes and entered the store. Inside, a jukebox was playing, a woman with a thin face and deep-set eyes stood behind the counter. A girl sat on a stool in front of the counter. Emil asked for a pack of cigarettes; he put his money on the counter and picked up the pack. Then he noticed the girl. She was smoking a cigarette and watching herself in the mirror behind the counter. A young thing, no more than twenty, he thought, pretty and probably more than aware of her own charms. But it was not this that held him there. Something familiar about her struck a spark, then suddenly he realized she was the one who'd been standing on the corner. A rather incredible idea, yet he was certain of this. And he didn't leave. Instead, he ordered a soft drink and sat down on the stool next to her.

After serving him, the woman behind the counter retired to the back of the store. The jukebox was still playing, the sickening love ballad absorbed by the girl who continued to suck at her soda straw while taking infrequent puffs on her cigarette. She was unaware of Emil.

Then the music died. Emil waited for the next disc to slide into place, but the silence remained, expanded, and finally the girl turned her head.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello," he answered.

Her eyes went to his glass; he

hadn't touched his soda. "Don't you like it?" she asked.

"Of course," he said.

"Oh, I thought you ordered it just as an excuse."

"An excuse for what?"

"To sit next to me, naturally."

He was taken back by her directness, and yet it appealed, he was fascinated. "You're rather young," he said.

"Nineteen," she replied. "That's old enough for anything, isn't it?"

"A matter of opinion," he answered. Then he came quickly to the point. "That was you I saw a while back, standing on a corner, was it not?"

"Perhaps."

"Why were you standing on the corner?"

"For reasons of my own. Something else you'd care to ask?"

"Yes, what's your first name?"

She twisted her straw and dropped it on the floor. Her cigarette she let fall in the bottle. Then she looked him in the eyes. "My name's Jane," she told him. "What's yours?"

"Emil."

"A screwy name." She reached for his cigarettes which were lying on the counter, opened the pack and helped herself to one and waited for him to light it. That done, she stood up.

"Let's go," she said, "that cranky bitch in the back'll be out charging us interest for sitting too long." With that, she turned and walked to the door. Emil followed.

Outside, she said, "Where you going now?"

"No place."

"You don't live around here?"

"No."

"That's what I thought. This is a crummy neighborhood. Somebody ought to drop a bomb on it and blow it up. Nobody'd miss it."

Emil laughed and walked her back to her door. Once there, she turned suddenly and looked up at him, saying, "I suppose you want to come up. Isn't that it?"

"No, not at all."

"Oh, then you don't want to kiss me, either, I suppose? Are you the shy kind, or just tricky?"

"Neither," he said, amused by her questions and still amazed at the veneer of hardness which, no doubt, she supposed passed for maturity.

"Neither?" She looked away, then suddenly flung herself upon him. Her hard lips smashed against his and he tried to push her away, but she was much stronger than he'd realized. She clung to him, hands clasped tightly behind his neck, her wiry, hard body pressed to his. As he reached back to break her grip, she sank her teeth into his lips, for what reason he didn't know, the pain so intense he tore her hands apart. He wanted to strike her, but she had willingly allowed him to disengage himself and stepped back. In the next moment she laughed, and ran into the hallway.

He followed, there was no light in

the hall. Her steps sounded on the stairs, going up, and he stopped, knowing it wouldn't do to follow. At the bottom step, he looked up and from the landing above some moments later, he heard her call down to him. "Good night!" Then she laughed.

He didn't answer. His bottom lip was swelling, the pain more intense now. As he touched his lip with his tongue, he knew it was bleeding. For a moment, anger seized him again, but he didn't move. She wasn't there on the landing now, but going up to the next flight of stairs. He listened to her footsteps growing fainter, and finally, somewhere above, a door closed.

Emil turned and left then, going back to his car through empty streets where the fog hung thick and almost motionless now.

When he returned home and looked at himself in the mirror, he found his lip discolored and swollen to enormous size. "A stupid experience," he thought, but he was done with it. Nothing like it would happen again. As for the girl, certainly he'd never see her any more.

He was wrong about that. A week later he met her again in the same candy store. All the previous nights he'd been excessively restless. When he returned to the store, he didn't see her, she was sitting in a booth and came to the counter as he sat down to wait.

"Hello," she said, turning her head. "I see you've come for me."

In answer, he smiled, he didn't want to admit the truth of this.

"I knew you'd come sooner or later."

"Really? That's more than I knew."

"That's possible, too," said the girl in a provoking tone. "But you couldn't stay away."

"You're taking much for granted."

"I don't think so," she said airily. Then: "Let's get out of this crummy joint."

Once on the sidewalk she turned to him, asking if he owned a car, an assumption in her voice that he did. He nodded in answer.

"Aren't you going to ask me to take a ride?"

"No, I can't," he explained, not having the car with him.

"I like cars." She said this flatly, as if to keep the conversation going, then asked for a cigarette. When he'd given her one and lit it for her, she said, "Now where are we going?"

"Have you any place in mind?"

"None at all. Let's keep walking."

They went a whole block in silence, then Emil said, "Tell me about yourself."

"There's nothing to tell," she answered blandly, and he knew by her tone that he'd get nothing out of her by pressing. As for himself, he realized he was acting foolishly, and yet he'd been compelled to return to the candy store this evening. Since the previous week the tension within him had grown and not till now had he felt any release.

They walked another block in silence, then the girl said, "Tell me about yourself. Are you married?"

"No."

"And money?"

"I make a good living."

"I suppose that's the same thing. Am I to feel impressed?"

"I'm not trying to impress you; I stated a fact, answered your question — truthfully."

"You didn't lie? Why not?"

"I don't know, except that I wanted to be nice."

"You're not making much sense." She looked up at him, saying this, regarding him with a pair of eyes that seemed to see right through him.

"Sometimes nothing makes sense," he added.

"That's so true," was her retort, a remark which puzzled him.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"Just that, or should I be specific?" She was smiling at him now, regarding him in a manner which was almost frightening, with the sharpness of an older woman, and he couldn't answer the question, didn't want to know. But she spoke again without waiting for his reply, saying, "I think something's wrong with you. Good night!"

And with that, she turned on her heels and walked away from him.

What she had said frightened him and he had no wish to follow her but went home, instead, thinking the affair at an end. By the following week he was beside himself, tor-

tered by an increasing restlessness which he could not stem. Finally, it drove him from the house.

He knew where he was going, who he wanted to see, but this time he didn't find the girl at the candy store. Night after night he returned there to sit under the scrutiny of the thin-faced woman with the deep-set eyes, and, at last, he inquired of her. But that one pretended ignorance of the child. She didn't know her, she said, adding when he described the girl, that no such one ever came into the store.

A lie, of course, and he started for home, oddly relieved, he found, for the whole thing was over. When he reached his house, the girl stepped from the shadowed doorway and startled him for the moment.

"Did I scare you?" she said, smiling up at him.

"No."

"Admit it, you were. You are scared of me, aren't you?"

"I don't see why I should be," he replied, but he was lying, he was frightened, though he didn't know why. More than that, he was curious and wanted to know how she'd found where he lived.

"That's for me to know," she answered. Then: "I thought you'd forgotten me."

He shook his head. "I didn't. I've been to the candy store every night this week but you weren't there."

"You're lying," she said.

"But I'm not. You can ask the woman behind the counter."

"She's a liar, too, that one," the girl replied, then she laughed. "Now, shall we go?"

"Where?"

"For a walk."

As he nodded his head, she took his arm. He was too disturbed to speak now, his whole body trembling violently, a kind of fear he'd never felt before possessing him. The girl didn't speak, either, and they went for blocks, arm in arm, till at last they reached the avenue near the waterfront. They passed the candy store, and its windows were dark now. At last, they reached the house where the girl lived. Emil recognized it when she stopped at the door and took her arm from his.

She looked up at him then, saying, "Well, here we are again." Then: "Do you want to come up?"

"Is it all right?" he asked, and saw her smile. Not like a child, there was too much knowingness in her eyes, a kind of evil that frightened and yet fascinated him.

"There's no one up," she said. "This is what you wanted, isn't it?"

Unnecessary to reply, she was already moving toward the door. He followed, and they mounted the dark stairway, stopping before a door on the second landing. There she produced a key and pushed open the door, springing a switch inside and flooding the room with light.

Once the door swung closed behind them, the girl crossed the room

and at a doorway opposite stopped, saying, "I'll only be a minute."

She entered the other room, there were only two, and a short while later called to him. He had seated himself, now he arose, crossed the room and entered the other. The light lit and, as he expected, a bed, but the girl not there.

With that, he turned around suddenly, not to find her but that other one, the woman from the candy store, and then Emil was no longer puzzled about anything. Now he knew. Knew why Jane had acted and spoken as she did, why the whole thing had been set up this way. Jane was young, she could taunt and tease and build up the tension in a man till he couldn't keep away, till he had to come back, but he wouldn't be coming back to Jane. If she needed a man, if she needed many men, she'd never have any trouble finding them. The candy store woman, though, she'd be the one who'd have the trouble, and it would be even worse for her if her need were greater than it should be. There were women like that, Emil knew, women who would have to use a girl like Jane as a lure merely to fulfill their desire.

Emil realized all this now as he watched the woman with the thin face and the deep-set eyes. She smiled at him as she stepped through the doorway and he knew then what she expected.



Side Street

BY JAMES T. FARRELL



He looked up at the red brick building fearfully. Maybe, he thought, they're doing it to her . . . right now . . .

THIS might be the most terrible day in his life, Tommy Brandon knew. He wished it were over with. He wished none of this had ever come about.

He drifted back and forth along the quiet side street, a very slender, very blond young man with a round face and dull blue eyes. Each time

he passed the red-brick building in the middle of the block he glanced at it briefly, and then moved on. Behind the green curtains on the first floor lay mystery and terror. Adeline was in there, and God only

knew what was happening to her. How long would he have to wait? What would happen to *him*?

Well, at least I haven't been a son of a bitch, he thought. At least I'm doing the decent thing by her. I'm being fair. I don't love her any more, but I'm not running away.

He walked along, oblivious to the buildings, the people passing him, the young children on the sidewalk, the passing automobiles. The sun was not too warm. It spread a promise of autumn over the bricks and asphalt of the treeless East Side street in New York City.

In the popular songs of love, he reflected, love was something wonderful that was related to the one and only girl, to moonlight and roses, to the change of seasons, to beauty, to hopes of happiness. But that wasn't the way it really was. Not at all. Love was risk and danger. The girl took the risk, and you pitied her. And you pitied yourself, too, because the girl wasn't the only one who suffered. Love was so different from the songs and the movies and the stories about love.

He thought of the nights with Adeline, and as always, he remembered the toilet bowl. Her apartment consisted of only one small room and the bathroom, and the bathroom had no door. He thought about how it had been with her, once the newness of her body was gone. When he walked on the street with her, he compared her with other girls. He couldn't help making

the comparisons, and almost always he found himself pitying Adeline and wanting the other girls.

He knew all Adeline's little secrets of dress and makeup. He knew how she hunted for bargains in order to look pretty. He knew how she had to save money to buy new dresses. But the new dresses didn't help very much. It was funny, but her body never seemed quite the same from one time to the next. Sometimes her thighs seemed too big; sometimes her buttocks were too large; sometimes she seemed too thick-waisted. And now this body of hers was causing him so much trouble, so much worry.

He turned at the corner and started back again. A pretty girl came out of a building, reading a letter. Her legs were slim and beautiful, and he looked at her with painful longing, wondering if anything like this had ever happened to her. The girl passed him and he turned to look after her, watching the proud, lithe swing of her hips. Then he remembered that women were formed the way they were because they had to bear babies, and he walked on.

He glanced at the red-brick house, then looked quickly away. Was Adeline afraid? he wondered. Did she blame him? Had it happened yet? God, would she never come out?

It was strange, the way he and Adeline had been so sure nothing like this would happen to them. He broke out in a sweat. Two men,

passing with briefcases in their hands, looked at him, and he walked on, fearful that they might be suspicious of him. He walked all the way to the corner, paused in front of the theater for a moment, then started back. Adeline and he had seen so many movies together. There hadn't been much else to do. They couldn't spend all their time sleeping together, and they couldn't just walk the streets. They'd talked themselves out a long time ago, and so they had gone to the movies. The pictures almost always ended happily. Love and a happy ending. And there, behind those mysterious green curtains, *there* was the happy ending. Pain and blood and fear and danger.

He walked on.

A jeep went by on the street, and then another. If he were a soldier, he reflected, he might become a hero. He might return with medals, have his picture in the paper, and find the road to fame. He wanted to be somebody. But how could he, with Adeline in the way? Adeline wanted something, too. He often felt that she was just as dissatisfied as he. He remembered the way she primped at the mirror, spending so much time on her face and hair. Didn't she want to be like the glamor girls? To live in exciting luxury and to have love and endless happiness like the women in the movies? He recalled the way she liked to take off her clothes for him, the way she would put on that one fine silk nightgown and walk up to him and let him take

it off again. Just like she imagined the movie queens would do. Maybe Adeline was right. Maybe they did it just that way. But what did movie queens do about babies they didn't want?

A girl passed him, and he glanced back at her. Girls were so lovely to look at. But no matter how lovely she was, you always got tired of her and wanted a new one. Maybe he was a son of a bitch, after all, he mused. Thinking about other girls this way was a hell of a thing to do while Adeline was in there going through so much pain and terror. God, if this waiting were only over!

He walked faster now, thinking about the money this had cost. He'd saved so long, putting a few dollars in the bank every week, and now it was all gone. Three hundred dollars for this—and if Adeline died, he could go to jail.

He was sweating again. She *will* die, he thought. She'll die, and then the police will come for me and throw me in a cell. He'd read about such things. They happened all the time. Suppose this place was raided? He watched an approaching automobile. Detectives could be in this car. The car passed the red-brick building. Tommy Brandon sighed and his shoulders sagged.

A girl came out of the building. She walked very stiffly, holding to another girl's arm for support. They walked slowly to the corner and got into a taxi.

That girl came through, he thought. She's in pain, and she can hardly walk, but she came through.

Adeline wouldn't feel like moving around for a few days, he knew. He'd have to take care of her, even if he had to lose a few days' work. But what would he do if she died on his hands?

He tried to think of something else.

A little boy passed, holding his mother's hand.

"Mommy!" the little boy said.

"Mommy, why is the sun?"

"For God's sake," the mother said. "Stop asking me questions before I go crazy."

"But *why*, mommie?" the little boy asked.

God, Tommy thought. Oh, God. If he and Adeline were married, and had children, they'd meet that. That, and diapers and wetting and being tied down and worries about money. This way was better — if only Adeline lived through it.

But if she died, it would be his fault. If he hadn't encouraged her, she wouldn't have consented to do this. He knew she had been waiting for him to suggest marriage. She hadn't thought of his side of it at all. All right, maybe he *was* a bastard. But what could he do? Had he no right to want to be free? To get somewhere? Could he help it if he didn't love her any more? Lots of guys in his position would have run away. It happened every day. It wasn't as if he *had* to stay.

Tommy gazed about him at the normal, minute by minute life of a quiet street in New York. None of these people knew the terrible drama that was going on right here in their midst. They didn't know Adeline might be dying behind those green curtains in that red-brick house. It didn't seem fair somehow that everyone else should look so happy, so unafraid. He envied them. They could go about their business, feeling safe and secure, with no worry on their minds, no fear of going to jail as an accomplice to a crime that was almost the same as murder.

God, he thought. Today might be the ruin of his life. Adeline might die, and then he would be blamed and his name and picture would be in the paper. He fantasied how it would be. He could see the expressions on people's faces as they read about him on the crowded subway trains. People would point him out on the street. He could hear them talking about him, condemning him, envying him the pleasure he'd had with Adeline. The fantasy had a morbid fascination. Here he was, walking up and down this street, and in just a short while he might be the central figure in a tragedy, a tragedy and a scandal.

What would he say? What would he tell the police? Why, he'd tell them he had loved her. He'd tell them how he had stood by her. He walked along, framing answers for the police and the district attorney.

They would question him for hours, probably, while he sweated and lit one cigarette from the end of another and gave the same answers over and over again. Maybe they would come right out and accuse him of murder.

But maybe Adeline wouldn't die, after all. Lots of girls went through the same thing, didn't they? Thousands of them, every year. It was pretty bad, but they lived through it. A couple of days, and they were as well as ever.

He turned at the corner and started back. It didn't seem possible that everyone around him could be so calm and quiet and unworried. If these people had troubles at all, they were nothing like his. God, if he could only be one of them.

He lit a cigarette, then threw it away. How much longer must he wait? It couldn't be much longer. He couldn't bear it.

She lay in bed. The little apartment was disorderly. Clothes lay scattered about everywhere, and the small room was heavy with the scents of cosmetics and cigarettes. The furniture was old and the walls were sooty, and through the open doorway to the bathroom he could see the toilet bowl. The ugly toilet bowl seemed to dominate the whole place.

This is our love nest, Tommy thought. This is the outcome of our love.

There was nothing he could do

now but sit. She had told him about the operation and then fallen asleep.

She awoke suddenly. Her eyes grew round, and for a moment he thought she was going to scream.

"What's the matter?" he asked anxiously.

She shook her head. "I dreamed I was dead."

He leaned over and put his arm around her.

"It was so awful," she said, sobbing.

God, he thought. Why doesn't she stop it?

He gave her a cigarette, and took one himself. She wiped her tears away and smiled weakly.

They looked at each other. There was nothing to say, nothing to do. Tommy got up, went to the small radio near the head of the bed, and turned it on. A crooner sang a love song.

Tommy smiled at her, and then he rose and went to the bathroom. He had postponed going as long as he could, but now he could wait no longer. Somehow it didn't seem right to use the ugly toilet at a time like this, when he knew that Adeline couldn't help seeing him, but it couldn't be helped.

Another love song began to murmur from the radio.

Tommy turned and, with an embarrassed blush on his face, came back and sat down beside the bed. They tried to smile at each other while the gurgling toilet drowned out the love song.

CRIME CAVALCADE

BY VINCENT H. GADDIS

Marital Mistake

In Great Yarmouth, England, Vincent E. Halliday, 53, was arrested for stabbing Doris Long with intent to do grievous bodily harm. After wounding her with a knife, Halliday had apologized. He said, "I am very sorry. I thought it was my wife."

Toy Department

A boxer in Boston, Mass., Earl (Windmill) Gray, was recently placed on three years' probation for carrying and firing a gun without a license. Excusing himself to the judge, Gray said, "I wouldn't harm anybody. I think of a gun as a yo-yo, just something to play around with."

Mouthful

The police department of Quezon City, Manila, P. I., was severely criticized by their chief for using long words in their reports. Said he: "Such pernicious practise, instead of expediting matters, makes the reports difficult to comprehend."

Puzzle of the Phony Prints

International Police, in a dispatch from Rome, Italy, admit concern

over a new gimmick — rubber gloves stamped with artificial fingerprints. The Belgian president of Interpol, international police organization, appointed three experts to determine how such prints might be immediately distinguished from natural ones. First warning of their use came from a German magazine article about an amputee who had obtained such gloves, with fingerprint ridges stamped on, from a rubber glove manufacturer.

Artistic Assault

In Mobile, Alabama, housepainter Atlas L. Batchelor really got painted up. When Officer Lambert Barrett arrived on the scene, he found two other painters had doused him with a double coat. "Even his ears were full of paint," he added. "We had to take him to the city hospital so they could clean out his ears." But, insisted Jesse Pollack, 41, there were extenuating circumstances. "We had a disagreement and run him off once and he came back. We didn't beat him up. We just painted him." Pollack and Charles T. Gartman, 53, were each fined \$50 for disorderly conduct.

Extended Visit

Glenn C. Eller of Detroit, visiting

the police station with thousands who took advantage of "Know Your Police Week," imposed on the hospitality offered him. As Eller was leaving after a tour of the Schaefer station, Patrolman Cecil Scroggins noticed a night stick bulging from the visitor's pocket. Recorder's Judge John P. Scallen gave him 10 days for simple larceny.

Deposit Devilry

Bank robbers in London, England, invented a new wrinkle recently, a phony night safe. But what was apparently its first try-out, in suburban Croydon, failed dismally. A storekeeper wishing to drop the day's receipts down the safe deposit chute found it concealed by a metal box reading "Lloyd's Bank — Temporary Night Safe," and dropped in his 300 pounds (\$840). But the next customer had more money, and a more suspicious nature. He noted there was no lock on the box and called police, remaining to warn other depositors until they arrived. Police decided that the hopeful thieves had waited nearby, only to flee when they saw that the gimmick didn't work.

In Oklahoma City, police learned from officials of the Northwest National Bank that they had found a fishing line with four regular hooks and two three-pronged ones in the night depository. The greedy angler had got the hooks safely down the chute, only to end with them hopelessly snarled above the money.

Farce of the Fraudulent Footsteps

Police in Lexington, S. C., confronted with a series of chicken thefts in which 70 to 75 fowls were stolen in several weeks, had a single clue, two pairs of outsized men's shoes. Calling in bloodhounds, Sheriff H. M. Caughman finally tracked the thieves, two teen-aged girls who had found the shoes useful in laying a phony trail. "Shoes were stolen, too," the sheriff reported.

Final Touch

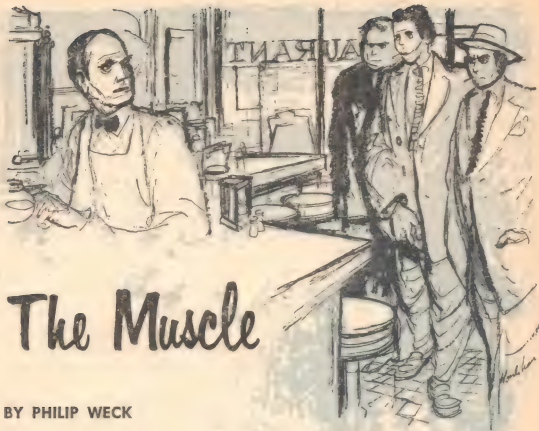
San Francisco burglars who escaped with about \$8000 from Vene-ta's restaurant possessed a deft sense of humor. Spotting a sign above the hors d'oeuvres counter, they placed it on the safe instead as they went out. "Help yourself!" it read invitingly.

That Grand Old Party Again

When a prowler searched the Newark, N. J., offices of the state Republican finance committee, his total take was \$10. "Must have been a Democrat," commented a committee spokesman. "Republicans keep their contributions in a bank."

Out-stink

In Highland Park, Calif., Officer M. N. Alexander was not allowed to enter police headquarters to file his report recently. He and a skunk had fired at each other simultaneously. Both shots found their target. The skunk died.



The Muscle

BY PHILIP WECK

CHARLIE had them pegged soon as they walked in. Hoods. Hired muscle. Setting up the big play. You could almost spell it out, looking at them; the kid, tall and wiry, maybe nineteen, ducktail haircut curling around his collar, sideburns, pegged pants, padded suit coat to hide a shoulder holster; the other, older, heavier, a scar on his face and the tiny, cold, grey eyes of a killer.

They sat down in the front booth, closest to the door, the two monkeys facing into the diner and the third one who'd been with them, the short, heavy man in the hat, across from

When the men walked into the diner Charlie knew they were killers. The question was: who were they after?

them. They didn't say a word; they just sat there and waited.

Charlie had the feeling that they'd just sit there and wait, hour after hour, day after day, until the play came along.

Sally, the waitress, dumped an armload of dishes on the counter. "Number four on two!" she yelled. "Cheeseburger, black coffee!"

It wasn't any stickup. Not by characters wearing hundred-dollar

suits, like the kid's. Who did they want, Charlie wondered. Only half a dozen people were in the joint at the tag end of the lunch hour. Three girls from the bindery down the street, a couple of shipping clerks from the warehouse, Bennie the book. The same people who came in at the same hour every day. Why the artillery? Who wanted them?

"Shake three!" yelled Sally.

Charlie said, "Shake 'em yourself; I'm busy." He dished out the number fours, spaghetti and one meatball apiece, slid the plates down the counter and put a hamburger on the grill.

That kid, he thought; he'd seen him around somewhere. At Lucky's poolroom, maybe, in the back when the poker game got hot and heavy. He'd be a mean customer, the kind who'd pistol-whip you just for the hell of it. What would he want here?

Sally came around the counter to the mixer, all the way around the front, keeping out of reach of his hands. The little snip. He flipped the hamburger, put a slice of cheese on top of it and capped it with half a bun. The number fours were still on the counter.

"Number fours waiting!" he said to the waitress. "What's the matter with you, girl?"

They were for the shipping clerks, two sallow young fellows, wise boys, always shooting off their mouths and crowding the pinball game and leering at Sally. She took the food over, again going the long way,

around the counter, like she had ever since the first day she and Charlie had worked alone.

Shipping clerks handle bills of lading and stuff that goes out in trucks. Maybe that was it. Maybe a hijack plan gone wrong, a bum steer, a doublecross. Charlie took the cheeseburger off, slid half a bun under it and shoved it down the counter, watching the two clerks with interest. You couldn't tell. They didn't look like grifters but they had to be, spending all that money on the pinball game.

Sally came back to take the shakes off the mixer.

"What's wrong with the customers in the first booth?" Charlie asked her, and he was startled at the look of pure hate she gave him. The little bag. He'd show her. One word to the boss and she'd be out on the street again.

The shakes went to the girls from the bindery. Fat slobs, all of them. Except maybe the one with red hair; she might not be bad in a pinch. Charlie watched Sally serve them and then go to the first booth and the muscle.

She took their orders, the kid leaning forward to ogle her, and for just an instant Charlie could have sworn he saw the flash of a gun butt, sticking out of his shoulder holster. But you couldn't be sure; it was too dark in this joint.

"Draw three," Sally yelled, and Charlie poured three coffees and Sally took them to the front booth.

Then she was back. "I've got one black waiting," she said from across the counter. "Get the lead out."

The little tramp! Angrily he poured the coffee he'd forgotten. Just wait! One word to the boss, that was all. Maybe tonight. Maybe, if she saw how he rated with the boss, she'd change completely; she wouldn't back away from his hands all the time. Maybe that was all she needed, just that little word.

And she wouldn't be bad, Sally. Not bad at all. Even better than the dumpy little blonde he'd caught trying to slip her fingers into the cash register that night a month ago after she'd lost all her shopping money to Bennie the book.

He scraped the grill clean and Sally strode around the lower end of the counter with an armload of dishes. A nice, trim figure, long, thin legs, not a bad face at all.

Then he realized the three girls were leaving, the red-head and her two slob friends. Pigs, all of them. But this bindery business — it didn't pay much. Maybe they had other jobs after dark. Back-room jobs. Maybe this was one of the deals, like blasting a babe who'd threatened to go to the district attorney. Charlie watched them as they giggled and gabbed and waddled down the aisle between booths and counter.

The muscle in the front booth didn't look up, didn't pay any attention, and the babes put their money on the counter and went out

into the early afternoon sunshine. Somebody else then. The shipping clerks, or Bennie.

"French apple," said Sally. "On two."

That was for the shipping clerks, and it meant they'd be leaving soon. He slid the two slices of pie along the counter and watched them as they ate noisily and nonchalantly and as Sally banged the dishes around and the muscle in the front booth sat there, waiting, the coffees in front of them untouched.

You wouldn't know. You'd think they were three lumps parked in the first booth, and the shipping clerks were just shipping clerks having lunch. You'd never guess, unless you could read character from faces, like Charlie could.

"Hey, Charlie," somebody said, "your phone's dead."

It was Bennie, the book.

"I can't get a sound out of it," he said. "Something's wrong."

Yeah, Bennie the book. Why hadn't he thought of him before?

"I'll have to report it," Charlie said. Sure, a bookie. Welshing on a bet. Or not turning the bets in to the syndicate. You hear of it all the time.

"That ain't good, Charlie," Bennie said. He looked worried, and Charlie wondered if maybe he knew it was coming. Bennie was a good guy, but if you played it the way he did you got to expect to get caught short sometime or other.

"I'll report it, Bennie," Charlie

said, and Bennie went back to the booth way in the rear and sat down again.

Up front, the muscle was just the same. They didn't look like they'd moved. Two of them facing the booth where Bennie sat and one, the one Charlie hadn't seen, facing the front door. Probably the guy who hired them, or the fingerman.

Charlie remembered something else. The telephone wire ran right along the wall past their booth. Past all the booths; it came in from a pole out front. They'd cut it, that was what. With a switchblade, probably, as they sat there, slashing the wire in two just to be on the safe side.

They'd been waiting for a long time now, and they'd go on waiting until the joint was almost empty, or until Bennie tried to go out. That was the way they worked a deal like this, waiting until most of the possible witnesses were gone.

Sally went around the counter again to the booth the shipping clerks were in so she could clear the table. Charlie watched her and he saw one of the clerks say something and heard them laugh, Sally, too, her laugh tinkling high and clear above the others. Something nasty, probably. Sure, she'd laugh when the customers cracked wise and wink at them and pat them on the cheek, but she didn't have a thing for Charlie.

Oh, she'd change, all right. Soon as she found out it was worth her

job she'd change. And it would be nice. Sally buttering up to him, not crying like the dumpy little blonde had been crying when he'd left her in her apartment, lying on the bed and crying while the picture of her bald-headed husband with the crescent-shaped wrinkles on his forehead was staring down from the dresser right at that very bed.

Sally wouldn't be crying like that. One word to the boss, one hint it was worth her job and she'd be smiling at him and saying, come back soon, Charlie, honey.

She brought the dishes from the shipping clerks' table and put them on the counter and went around to the cash register, in front of the counter, and rang up their money. Then she went all the way around the counter to the back and behind it to wash the dishes.

Oh, she was smart, Sally was. But she'd learn.

The shipping clerks got up to leave, and Charlie went taut. Maybe he'd been right in the first place and it was a hijacking deal. He watched them and he watched the muscle in the first booth.

The clerks went right past that booth, not a glance at it. One of them lingered at the pinball machine and the other looked at his watch and said something and then they went out. And still the muscle hadn't budged.

Then it had to be Bennie. Bennie the book.

And they were almost alone now.

Sally got the pie plates the clerks had left behind and washed them.

"You get the first booth," she said to Charlie. "I'm going home now." And she went into the back room. She was off after the lunch crowd.

Charlie watched her go through the swinging door. A nice, broad beam. A nice, strong back, in her white uniform. And all she needed was to know it would be worth her job.

Might as well tell her now, let her get used to the idea.

He went into the back room, too, through the swinging door.

She had the uniform off and was standing there in her panties and bra and white skin, a lot of white skin. Nice, really nice.

And she had the butcher knife in her hand.

"One more step and I'll split your belly open!" she said. Her face was white and set and she was glaring at him. She held the knife with her wrist down, as if she knew how to use it. And it was sharp. Charlie had sharpened it himself that morning.

"All right!" he said. "All right! Don't get excited; take it easy!"

He backed out and went down the counter. The little tramp! The bum! He'd show her! Pulling a knife on him!

A minute later she came out, too, her dress on and her bag over her shoulder, not a look at him, not a smile, not a word. Right out to the

street and home without a word. Just wait.

Any minute now they'd make their play. They'd never have it any better.

Bennie the book got to his feet, stuffing his scratch sheet into his pocket. Slowly, unconcernedly, he ampled along the counter, toward the door.

"Don't forget to report that phone, Charlie," he said.

Right past that first booth he went, and the muscle watched him, turning their heads as he went past, cautiously, waiting.

To the front door Bennie went and he pushed it open and he, too, went out onto the street.

They didn't follow him.

They got up and they came toward him, the kid a step in front, walking catlike on the balls of his feet. He slipped his right hand into the front of his suit jacket, where Charlie'd thought he had a shoulder holster, and he brought a gun out.

The second man, the one with the killer's gray eyes, had a gun, too.

It couldn't be. He didn't get it at all. Transfixed, he watched them come closer, step by step. First the kid, his eyes bright. Then the older hood. Then the other man, the little one, the fingerman or maybe the one who'd hired them, taking his hat off and wiping the stone-bald dome of his head, crescent-shaped wrinkles creasing his brow.

And no one was left in the joint but Charlie.

What's Your Verdict?

No. 15 — The Good Time

BY SAM ROSS

JULIE WINTHROP was a girl who was always out for a good time. Anything, she felt, might happen tomorrow. Therefore, she figured she'd better live for today.

Her philosophy made her popular throughout the town, and her youthful prettiness only added to the popularity. All the young men in town knew they could count on Julie for an exciting evening; night-clubs, movies, the local bars or just sitting around to watch TV, it was all the same to Julie, so long as she had fun.

Art Franklin was the man who took Julie out most. Art kept on making passes at Julie, but Julie wasn't quite that carefree. She fended Art off with every wile at her disposal. It wasn't that she didn't like Art, but she had her own ideas about men. "Here today and gone tomorrow," she once told a girl friend. "That's all men are. You have to make them respect you, so you can't be giving in all the time, even if you want to."

But one day she just couldn't resist any more. Art exerted all his charm, and the result was that Julie

spent the night in his apartment. It wasn't until nearly a month later that she discovered the horrible truth.

She called Art on the phone. "Did you mean what you said about loving me forever?" she asked.

"Sure, baby," Art said. "Sure I did. Why?"

"Let's get married."

Art objected violently. Then Julie told him she was going to have a baby.

For some days after that everything got confused; Art and Julie were screaming at each other, both of them worried, each of them mad. But after a while Art gave in. He promised to marry Julie.

That straightened everything out nicely — until the day, three months later, when Julie heard that Art had got himself engaged to another girl, a pretty little blonde named Agnes.

Julie blew her brunette top. She cursed Art up and down, and, when she was through, she knew what she was going to do. She started making the arrangements to sue Art for breach of promise.

It wasn't long after that that Art found himself the defendant in a court of law.

Julie summed up her case simply: "He promised to marry me," she told the judge, "and now he's engaged to this other girl, and he's going to marry her. If that isn't breach of promise I don't know what is."

Art put up a flimsy defense, stating that he hadn't promised to marry Julie at all, but this was quickly knocked down when Julie's next-door neighbor testified that she'd heard the whole conversation. Julie pressed her advantage:

"Now you know he did promise to marry me. He's guilty of breach of promise as soon as he promises to marry somebody else — and you've got to find him guilty now that he's engaged to this other girl."

Art tried again, with a different line of defense. First off, he admitted that he'd made the promise, and that he was now engaged to somebody else.

"But she forced me to make the promise," he stated. "She's going to have a baby. It'll be my baby — so she just insisted that I promise to marry her. And after a while there was nothing I could do but agree."

"Of course not," Julie said. "You have to marry me."

"But a promise you're forced to make doesn't count under the law," Art said.

"Who forced you?" Julie asked. "You forced yourself. Whose fault is it that I'm going to have a baby in the first place? That's why you promised, and I'm going to hold you to it."

Who was right?

What's *your* verdict?

ANSWER

Art was right. Any promise of marriage which is based solely on the pressure of previous immorality is automatically void. Art was acquitted of the charge — though the judge made him pay a considerable sum for the maintenance of the unborn child, and his new girl-friend deserted him immediately.



The War



Tom C. Sullivan

Clancy Ross was always ready to help out an old friend — even after the old friend was dead.

A Clancy Ross Novelette

BY RICHARD DEMING

THE BLONDE GIRL looked out of place in the sleek surroundings of Club Rotunda. Not because she lacked sufficient beauty to fit the glamorous atmosphere, but it was a fragile, timid sort of beauty instead of the brittle and sophisticated type most of the female clientele of the night club possessed.

Furthermore, she wore a cheap cloth coat instead of fur, and the dress beneath it, while neat and well fitting, was a plain street dress instead of a low-cut formal.

She waited uncertainly in the archway, between the lobby where the cloakrooms were and the main part of the club, as the white-tied headwaiter approached.

The man bowed to her as courteously as he would have to a bejeweled heiress, but he didn't ask if she wanted a table.

Instead he asked politely, "May I help you, madam?"

"I . . . I wanted to see Clancy Ross," she said.

The headwaiter's expression did not change, but somehow he managed to convey the impression that this request was equivalent to asking for an interview with God. "Is Mr. Ross expecting you?"

She shook her head. "He . . . doesn't even know me. I'm the wife . . . widow . . . of an army friend. Mrs. Talbot. Mrs. James Talbot."

"I see." The headwaiter reflected a moment. Without much encouragement in his tone, he said, "Mr. Ross is usually occupied upstairs about this time of the evening, but I'll phone him if you wish."

"Upstairs," meant the gaming room over the night club, the girl knew.

"If you would, please," she said.

There was a house phone in a small, chest-high recess in the wall to one side of the archway. Lifting it, the headwaiter said, "Mr. Ross, please."

After a few moments' wait, he said, "Hello. Mr. Ross? Sorry to disturb you, but there's a Mrs. James Talbot here asking to see you."

Then he looked faintly surprised, said, "Yes, sir. Immediately," and hung up.

At a snap of the headwaiter's fingers a white-coated waiter instantly appeared.

"Show Mrs. Talbot to Mr. Ross's office," the headwaiter ordered.

At the rear of the night club was a set of mirrored double doors. When the waiter raised three fingers of his left hand, the doors quietly slid apart to disclose an elevator car. As they stepped through and the doors closed again, the girl saw that what she had taken for mirrors was actually one-way view glass, and from inside the car a full view of the night club could be obtained.

The car let them out into a thickly-carpeted lobby containing a number of easy chairs, a pair of sofas and an assortment of smoking stands. A single formally-dressed couple sat on one of the sofas smoking. Archways gave off this lobby in two directions, straight ahead and to the right. The one straight ahead let into a large, well-populated room from which came the whir of slot machines, the click of dice, the droning voices of croupiers and a muted jumble of conversation. The other archway led into a small and crowded bar.

The waiter turned left and led her down a hall in a third direction.

They passed two empty rooms which, through their open doors, the girl could see were furnished with nothing but round poker tables and chairs, at the end of the hall came to a closed door. At a deferential knock by the waiter, the door instantly opened, and for the first time the girl saw the man her husband had told her so much about.

Clancy Ross was a slim man in his early thirties with sharply de-

fined features and prematurely gray hair of uniform silver. In contrast to his hair, his eyebrows were a startling jet black over blue eyes as opaque as painted china. A thin white scar ran along the edge of his jaw from his left ear to the slight cleft in his chin.

"So you're Janice," he said to the girl, exposing white teeth in a smile of welcome. "Come on in."

He nodded dismissal to the waiter.

Janice entered a lushly-furnished office nearly twenty feet square. Indirect lighting slightly tinted with rose imparted a mellow glow to the huge mahogany desk in one corner, to the single surrealistic painting over the fireplace and to the built-in bar in the center of one wall.

"Sit down," Ross said, waving to an easy chair. He looked her over appraisingly, smiled again. "Jim wrote me you were beautiful, but until now I assumed it was just natural bridegroom's exaggeration."

Blushing slightly, she seated herself. When she looked up at him, he was still studying her, and her eyes timidly dropped again.

"Have a drink?" he asked.

"No thanks," she said. Her voice was pleasantly husky.

He extended a silver cigarette case, but she shook her head.

When the man flipped a cigarette into his own mouth and crossed to the desk to pick up a desk lighter, she recognized at once what it was her husband had so many times tried to explain about Clancy Ross's

movements. But Jim Talbot's vague description that, "He generally moves slow and sort of casual, but like he could move ten times as fast if he had to," didn't do justice to the man's controlled grace. He was not a big man, perhaps five eleven and weighing around a hundred and seventy pounds, but his body was as finely poised as a trained athlete's.

Even in so simple an action as picking up the desk lighter and thumbing it to flame, his movements suggested hair-trigger coordination. Yet there was nothing effeminate in his exceptional gracefulness. It was an athletic, entirely masculine thing.

Replacing the lighter, Ross seated himself on the edge of the desk and allowed a thin stream of smoke to trickle from his nostrils.

"What are you doing in St. Stephen, Janice?" he asked. "And where'd you leave Jim?"

"Jim is . . ." She closed her eyes a moment, then said, "Jim is dead."

In the act of replacing the cigarette in his mouth, Ross stopped it inches from his lips. His face smoothed of all expression and he asked softly, "How?"

"Murdered," she said. "Shot to death in bed at home. A week ago. Or eight days, rather. Last Sunday night."

The slim man didn't offer condolences, but his withdrawn expression indicated to the girl that his thoughts were turned backward to the soldier he had bunked with in

Korca. She knew suddenly that the suave gambler's friendship for her dead husband had been as deep as Jim's for him.

"You get closer to a guy in combat than you ever could in civilian life," Jim had tried to explain. "Outside of the army Clancy and I could never have become pals. Him a college guy, used to big money and champagne and society dames. Me a grease monkey whose highest ambition was to own my own filling station. Plus a bringing up that taught me gambling was a mortal sin. What would we have had in common outside of a foxhole? But when you're backing each other up against a flock of gooks, and your life depends on the other guy, you forget all the stuff you considered important in civilian life and get to know a guy as he really is."

It was that same night Jim had told her, if she ever got in a jam and he wasn't around, to run straight for Clancy Ross. When she protested that she didn't even know the man, and had never even heard from him except on the occasion he sent a wedding present, Jim said that didn't matter.

"You don't have to see somebody every day to stay pals," he said. "I don't write to Clancy twice a year, or hear from him any oftener. But if he dropped in tomorrow and asked me to put the station in hock in order to give him a stake, I wouldn't even ask what for. And he'd do as much for me."

It was this remembered advice, given her by Jim nearly a year and a half before, just after their marriage, which had brought her in desperation to the proprietor of Club Rotunda.

After a considerable silence, the gambler said, "I don't recall seeing it in the paper. And Blair City news usually rates a mention in St. Stephen."

"It was only second page in Blair City," the girl said. "I don't suppose it made the wire services. Just another husband shot by his wife."

Ross's gaze flicked at her. "Maybe you'd better elaborate on that," he suggested quietly.

"It was made to look like that," the girl said wearily. "Jim was the only witness to the Shelly killing. It took place right in front of his filling station."

The gambler thought this over, decided to accept it. "The Shelly killing, eh?" he said thoughtfully. "I saw that in the papers, of course. So you were framed. How do you happen to be running around loose?"

"I'm out on bond," she said. "I'm only indicted for second-degree murder. They arranged that. Got the indictment reduced so I'd be eligible for bond, and posted the bond themselves. So while I was free I could conveniently commit suicide, I suppose. Only instead I ran."

"Who is 'they'?" he asked.

"Bix Lawson and his crowd. The gang attempting to take over Blair

City from the Shelly mob."

Ross nodded. "I heard Bix was starting to expand beyond St. Stephen," he said mildly. "He has things pretty well consolidated here now, and he's looking for new worlds to conquer."

A strange expression grew on the girl's face. "I . . . I forgot for the moment what your business is, Mr. Ross. I suppose you owe Lawson a certain amount of allegiance."

He grinned at her unresentfully. "I don't owe allegiance to a soul on Earth, Janice. I have certain financial arrangements with a few politicians and cops, but none of it goes through Bix Lawson's political machine. I've been invited in a number of times, but I prefer to stay a free agent. And the name's Clancy, not Mr. Ross."

She examined his indolent grin, finally said, "All right, Clancy. I'm sorry."

The phone on the desk buzzed quietly. Plucking it from its cradle, Ross held it to his ear and said, "Yes?"

For some time he listened without comment. Then he said, "Stall him ten minutes. Then send him up. Keep giving the wrong signal to the elevator, so he'll think it's not on the main floor. Matter of fact, it won't be for a time."

When he hung up, he said, "Your friends seem to have tailed you from Blair City. One of Bix Lawson's pet cops is downstairs inquiring about you. We'll resume our conver-

sation later."

Crossing the room, he opened the office door and let her pass through before him. When he reached the elevator, he pressed a mother-of-pearl button, and a moment later the doors opened.

"Mrs. Talbot is going upstairs," he said to the operator. "Show her where the bar is in my living room, and how to work the television set. Then go back down to main. If anyone inquires if you saw her, you haven't."

"Yes, sir," the operator said.

2.

This time when a knock came on the office door, Clancy Ross merely called, "Come in," instead of personally opening it, as he had done for Janice Talbot.

The man who entered was wide all the way down from his shoulders to his thighs, particularly at the waist. He had thick, unimaginative features and a flat-footed walk which branded him as a cop who had walked beat for many years, in spite of his expensively-tailored gabardine suit.

The gambler said, "Evening, Morton."

The detective came to a stop in front of the desk. Ignoring Ross's waved offer of a chair, he said in a husky voice, "A gal named Janice Talbot came in the club a while ago, Clancy. I want her."

"Oh?" Ross inquired. "What's the

charge?"

"Skipping bond. The beef's from Blair City."

"Maybe you'd better inquire downstairs," Ross said. "There's no one by that name up here."

"I already inquired downstairs. All I get from your trained seals is blank looks. I know she's still here, because the back and side entrances have been covered ever since she walked in. Let's not play games, Clancy. Get her up."

The slim gambler lit a cigarette. Blowing a thin spiral of smoke at the detective, he said, "Got a search warrant?"

"I can get one fast," Morton growled.

"Not without a sudden drop in income. If I'm not mistaken, I match what Bix Lawson pays you. And never ask for odd jobs, like the one you're doing now. All I ask is to be let alone. Which includes anyone I happen to have as a guest."

"Listen," the detective said. "Bix wants this dame. You going to buck him?"

"Maybe you'd better rephrase that to: is he going to buck me?"

Morton frowned. "I don't get you, Clancy. You know all it would take is an excuse for Bix to lower the boom. How you've got away with staying independent this long, I don't know. Nobody else in town can. But don't try to cross Bix."

"I'll give you a message for him," Ross said. "Janice Talbot is the widow of my best friend. Tell him to

lay off."

The detective looked incredulous. "Tell Bix that? You looking for a war?"

"Declaring it," Ross said indifferently. "If Bix wants it that way."

Morton emitted a sarcastic laugh. "I always thought you were too big for your boots, Clancy. You better go pick out a casket."

Easily the gambler came to his feet and rounded the desk to pull open the office door.

"Good night, Sergeant," he said politely. "It's been a pleasant relationship, but don't drop by for your weekly stipend unless you bring along word that Bix has lost interest in my friend's widow."

The detective trod heavily over to the smaller man and glowered down into his face. "You think you can tie a can to my tail, punk? This place will be knocked over so fast . . ."

That was as far as he got when four stiffened fingers jabbed into his stomach, causing him to gasp and involuntarily bend forward. Then the hard edge of the gambler's palm smashed alongside his neck.

As the detective started to stumble to his knees, Ross grabbed him behind the head at the same time he brought up a knee. There was a dull crunch as the man's nose flattened. When the smaller man released him, he sat heavily, his mouth hanging open and crimson streaming from both nostrils onto his expensive suit. When Ross care-

fully kicked him in the jaw, he toppled backward and lay still.

Crossing to the desk, the gambler picked up the phone and said briskly, "Sam Black, please."

A moment later he said, "Sam? There's a mug on my office floor I want heaved into the alley. I also want the gaming room closed down. Get the customers out gently, but fast, and have the boys strip out the equipment and load it on the trucks right away. When everything's set, phone me up in my apartment. Oh, yeah. Don't forget to change the elevator doors."

3.

Ross found Janice Talbot quietly sitting in the front room of his third-floor apartment. The sliding panel which concealed the bar had been pushed open by the elevator operator, as instructed, but she hadn't mixed herself a drink. Nor was the television set turned on.

The gambler mixed himself a weak scotch and water, raised black eyebrows in inquiry at the girl, but she shook her head. Carrying his drink, he sank into a chair near hers.

"Now tell me the whole story," he suggested.

She began in a halting voice, but as she progressed, her narrative became more and more fluent. She said that the general political and gang situation in Blair City was more or less public knowledge, because the Blair City *Star* had been

running an editorial campaign on the clash for power between the local Shelly machine and the expanding Lawson mob from St. Stephen. When Maurice Shelly was shot down on the street in broad daylight, it was assumed as a matter of course that he was killed on the order of the St. Stephen gang boss, and no one at all was surprised when every known member of the Lawson gang in Blair City was pulled in for questioning.

All had alibis, of course, but Jim Talbot had been a witness to the shooting and had caught a glimpse of the gunman's face as the death car sped away. On his positive identification of a Lawson gang member named Skat Owens as the killer, the man had been indicted despite the fact that he had been able to produce five witnesses to testify that he'd spent that entire afternoon in a poker game.

Jim had been offered police protection, but had refused it, Janice said. Nevertheless the police had kept him under protective surveillance pending Owens' trial. A stakeout had been in a car in front of the apartment the night Jim was killed.

The girl explained that the intruder apparently had gotten in the back door by means of a picklock or skeleton key, as that door was found unlocked, and she was sure they had checked it before going to bed. She assumed the killer must have previously visited the apartment at some time when she and

Jim weren't home and had thoroughly cased the place, for he had used Jim's own gun, which had been kept in Jim's top bureau drawer. It was a .45 automatic which Jim had obtained in service.

Their bedroom had twin beds, Janice said. She was awakened by the shot but, before she fully realized what had happened, the killer had tossed the gun onto her bed and disappeared.

Within seconds of the shot the stakeout was beating on the front door. When she let him in, he at first accepted her story, but the next day she was arrested. Unfortunately she and Jim had had a rather loud argument the same evening he was killed, and some neighbors had overheard it. Given an apparent motive, the police had decided it hadn't been a gang killing after all.

Ross asked, "What was the argument about?"

The girl's eyes glistened with tears. "Nothing much. About some man who smiled at me when we were out the night before. We'd only been married a year and a half, and Jim was sometimes jealous."

"You said the Lawson mob put up bond for you. How'd that happen?"

"It didn't come from Bix Lawson directly," she said. "Actually it was a lawyer named Gerald Thorpe who posted bond. He's the attorney Jim engaged to make out the legal papers when he bought the filling station.

But Lawson must have been behind it. I barely know Thorpe and he owes me nothing."

Ross asked, "Why do you assume Lawson got you out of jail in order to knock you off and frame it as a suicide?"

"I just reasoned it out," the girl said. "See how effectively that would close the case? I'm accused of the murder and kill myself. Why should the police look any farther? But if I go to trial, naturally part of my defense is going to be that Jim was a witness to a gang killing, and even the police feared he might be in danger, or they wouldn't have had him under protective surveillance. Why else would Bix Lawson go to the trouble and expense of getting me out on bond?"

"Sounds logical," the gambler admitted. "On the other hand, apparently they tailed you all the way from Blair City here. Why aren't you already dead?"

Janice shrugged helplessly.

A buzz sounded and Ross crossed to the bar, set down his half-empty glass and picked up the bar extension phone.

"Yes?" he said. Then, "Fine, Sam. Come on up, will you?"

A few minutes later Sam Black let himself into the apartment by his own key. Clancy Ross's first assistant was a short, barrel-chested man of middle age with unnaturally wide shoulders, a flat face and a studiously stupid expression. The expression was a gross deception.

Introduced to Janice Talbot, he nodded politely, then immediately turned his attention to his boss.

"What's all this about?" he asked. "Is there some reason we're spitting in Bix Lawson's face? Or just one of your whims?" The stocky man shook his head. "I thought we were operating on a live and let live policy. Bix leaves you alone, and you leave him alone."

"He stopped leaving me alone," the gambler said.

Sam Black wrinkled his low forehead. "Since when? He was in last night, and polite as you please. You going off half-cocked again?"

"When did I ever go off half-cocked?"

"Every time you imagine somebody's trying to push you an inch," Sam informed him. "I never saw such a touchy guy. What'd this Morton character do? Forget to say sir?"

"He called you a baboon," Ross said indulgently. "I don't like my menials insulted."

Sam Black snorted. "You know Morton's a pet of Lawson's."

"You're a pet of mine." Ross turned to Janice. "You bring any luggage with you from Blair City?"

"Just a bag. I left it in a dime locker at Union Station."

"Take Mrs. Talbot down to the station for her bag," Ross instructed Sam. "Then take her somewhere and hole her up. Good. So good even Bix Lawson can't find her."

"Oh," Sam said. He turned his

small eyes to the girl and studied her estimatingly. "That's different. For a job like this I can take care of Bix Lawson and his whole mob myself."

"Sam is a cavalier in the rough," Ross told Janice in a dry voice.

4.

Clancy Ross didn't wait for Bix Lawson to make the next move. The following morning at nine o'clock he called at the Park Plaza suite where the gang leader and political boss lived.

A sultry brunette in lounging pajamas answered his ring.

"Lawson around?" Ross asked.

Before answering, the girl ran her eyes over the gambler from his silvery hair to his highly polished shoes. Then she said, "You're Clancy Ross, aren't you?"

"Guilty," Ross said. "Do I know you?"

"We haven't met," the girl said. "I recognized you from your description. I've heard Bix speak of you. I'm Diana Wills."

Ross bowed slightly.

"Bix is downstairs having breakfast," the girl said. "He should be back most any time now. Come in."

Ross followed her into the front room, watching the sensuous sway of her hips as she walked over to a small portable bar. He stopped next to an easy chair near the bar, waiting for her to seat herself first, but she made no move to take a seat. Instead she turned suddenly, so that

she was inches away from him and looking up into his face.

"Have a drink?" she asked.

Ross grinned down at her. Like all Bix Lawson's women, she was flawlessly beautiful in a lush, slightly overdeveloped sort of way. The thin lounging pajamas, red-topped with black bottoms, clung to her figure caressingly, outlining every curve. To make sure Ross would get the full effect of her beauty, she had apparently undone one more button as she walked across the room with her back to him, for when she answered the door only the top button at her throat had been open. Now the V extended to between her full breasts, exposing the full swell of their upper halves.

Ross said, "Not so early in the morning."

Also like all Bix Lawson's women, there was an expression of unrest on Diana Wills' face. There was a steady turnover among the political boss' mistresses, Ross knew, not so much because he tired of them as because they tired of him. Apparently there was something lacking in the man as a lover which made him incapable of holding the interest of a young and fiery woman for long in spite of the luxury he lavished on her. This one was a relatively recent acquisition, Ross knew, for the last time he had seen Bix Lawson, he'd had a Loretta something-or-other on his arm. That had been less than a month before, but already Ross's new mistress seemed to be inviting

passes from any available man who came within range.

This was a definite pass too. It was obvious not only in the inviting view she offered, but in the lazy way she smiled up at him, drew in her stomach and arched her breasts upward to within a fraction of an inch of his chest. Though Ross had never had any complaints from women, he wasn't conceited enough to think it was solely his irresistibility which caused the girl to extend such an open invitation on their first meeting and after an exchange of only a few words.

She was ripe for the first man who walked along who wasn't actually repulsive.

She said, "Cigarette?"

Still grinning down at her, Ross said, "No, thanks."

"Anything?" she asked.

"Well, yes, as long as you're being so hospitable," he said.

Casually he put a hand on either side of her waist. For a moment she just stood still, but when he made no effort to do anything more, her body leaned forward, pressing her firm breasts against his chest, and her head turned upward.

Ross dipped his head to touch her lips, and suddenly he had a tornado in his arms. Her arms slid around his neck, glueing their mouths together and her body worked against his in trembling ecstasy.

When he felt the beginnings of suffocation from lack of breath, Ross tried to come up for air. But

it took a struggle. He finally had to release her waist, put both hands behind his neck to grasp her wrists, and forcibly break her grip.

Pushing her away, he said, "Whoa! Bix may walk in here at any minute."

She stood with slumped shoulders, her breath coming heavily and unrestrained desire in her face. "Maybe it'll be another thirty minutes," she said.

"Or another thirty seconds. We'll take this up again under different circumstances."

"At your place, for instance?"

"I think that would be wiser than here."

"Tonight?"

"Possibly. Depends on what comes up. After I talk to Bix. I may be up to my ears for a time."

A key rattled in the front door. "Wipe your lips," the girl said rapidly.

She glanced at a wall mirror, saw her own lipstick was smeared all over her mouth, and disappeared through a doorway into the next room. Ross leisurely dabbed at his own lips with a handkerchief, returned it to his pocket and turned to the door just as it opened.

Bix Lawson was a huge man of forty-five, thick through the shoulders and chest and with just the bare beginnings of a paunch. His head was large, with prominent features and slightly bulging eyes. Dense black hair, cut short, clung to his head like a skullcap and came to a

widow's peak at his broad forehead.

With him was a tall, rawboned man of nearly six feet six with an undershot jaw and flat, expressionless eyes.

Just inside the door Lawson stopped to examine the gambler with a mixture of surprise and beligerence. The right hand of the rawboned man came up and began to toy with his top jacket button.

"Hello, Bix," Ross said mildly. "I dropped by to have a little talk. About last night, to start off."

After studying him for a moment, the gang leader said coldly, "Come on out to the sun room."

Diana Wills appeared in the doorway from the next room, her make-up repaired and her pajama jacket buttoned to her throat.

"Mr. Ross has been waiting for you, Bix," she said. "I offered him a drink, but he didn't want one."

Ignoring her, Lawson walked right past her, leading the way to the sun room. Ross went second, with the tall strong-arm man bringing up the rear.

In the sun room Lawson tossed his suit coat onto a wicker settee, seated himself in a canvas deck chair. Ross took a similar chair facing Lawson's and lit a cigarette. The rawboned man stationed himself at Bix Lawson's side, remained standing.

Lawson made no effort to introduce his bodyguard.

"I think it's time we had a little talk too," Lawson said in a cold tone. "I haven't pushed you very

hard to come in the setup, Clancy, because we always got along on a co-operative basis. Until last night."

"A minor correction," Ross said. "You haven't pushed me because I don't push worth a damn. And the reason we've gotten along up to now is that I don't care about your business and you knew better than to mess in mine. Last night was my business."

Bix Lawson flushed and the tall man at his side let his eyes freeze over. The gambler ignored the bodyguard, keeping his eyes on Lawson's face.

With an effort at control, the gang leader said, "What's this girl to you?"

"She's the widow of an old army pal. Who was conveniently knocked off before he could testify against one of your hoods. I wouldn't want to see her join her husband."

Bix Lawson stared at him. "What you mean, join her husband?"

"She has a feeling you plan to arrange a suicide for her, so Blair City will file her husband's murder as closed."

Lawson's eyes hooded over. When he spoke, there was a note of exasperation in his voice, but to Ross' ears it had a slightly false ring. "Hell, Clancy, all I want is to return her quietly to Blair City before they find out she's gone, and a friend of mine has to forfeit bond."

"I'll cover for you on that," Ross said easily. "Let me know the date of trial, and I'll see that she shows up

in court."

Bix Lawson glared at him. "Listen, Clancy, I'm tired of horsing around. I want that girl."

"Go to hell," the gambler said amiably.

Lawson merely continued to glare. The man next to him said from the corner of his mouth, "Give me the word, boss."

Clancy Ross examined the man curiously. The bodyguard stared back without expression. After a moment Ross returned his attention to the political boss.

"I may as well make things clear, Bix. The policy on Janice Talbot is just what I told your pet dog last night. Hands off. Completely. One pass at her and you've got an all-out war."

"Then maybe we'd better put the opposing general out of action at the start," Lawson suggested softly.

Ross grinned at him. "You can try. But you catch the first slug. Want to bet this ape's speed against mine?"

For a long time the gang leader stared at him while his bodyguard stood stiffly, his hand hovering near the opening in his jacket. Then Lawson licked his lips. Contemptuously Ross came to his feet.

"See you around," he said.

Turning his back, he started from the room, but in the doorway abruptly spun in time to see Bix Lawson's gestured signal. The raw-boned man's hand was completely out of sight under his armpit.

With a movement which didn't seem in the least hurried, Ross's right hand flickered inside his jacket. The bodyguard's gun was just emerging from its shoulder holster when Ross's .38 automatic roared once.

The slug caught the bodyguard in the right knee, spinning him sideways to sprawl headlong next to his employer's chair. A snub-nosed revolver clattered to the floor, the man grasped his shattered knee with both hands and began to groan.

His china-blue eyes bright, Ross waited in the doorway for Lawson to make some move. The gang leader merely gripped the arms of his chair and stared back at him, sweat beading his upper lip.

Unhurriedly Ross crossed to him and smashed the barrel of his automatic alongside Lawson's jaw. Chair and all went sidewise, spilling Lawson on the floor, where he lay on one elbow, looking up from eyes dulled by shock and pain.

"As I was saying, see you around," Ross said pleasantly.

This time he didn't bother to look back.

In the middle of the dining room he met Diana Wills coming from the front room.

"What was that shot?" she asked, wide-eyed. "Did you kill him?"

"Just broke his stooge's knee," Ross said. "There won't be any trouble, because Bix won't want the Plaza management to know he uses the suite for gun duels. You might go administer first aid until Bix

gets around to calling a doctor."

He left the girl staring after him and moved on to let himself out of the suite.

5.

The Club Rotunda didn't open until four P.M. Nevertheless Clancy Ross found the place well populated when he returned from his conference with Bix Lawson. In addition to the cleaning personnel and Sam Black, there were seven cops in the place. Two of them carried fire axes.

Detective Lieutenant Niles Redfern was in charge of the raiding squad. He was a tall, lanky man with a lean, intelligent face and a perpetually morose expression. Ross knew him not only as an honest cop, but an incorruptible one, and tended to like him.

However, his liking didn't show on his face when he asked mildly, "What's up, Lieutenant?"

"You're just in time, Clancy," Redfern said. "Your boy Sam insists you're the only one with a key to the elevator, and I was just about to give the order to smash those pretty mirrored doors with an axe."

The gambler's black eyebrows raised. "You're a little free with the city's money, aren't you, Lieutenant? Or don't you think I'd sue for damages?"

Grinning sadly, the lieutenant held a search warrant under Ross's nose. "You must have missed a pay-off to some politician," he said

cynically. "I've got orders to confiscate all gambling equipment found on the premises."

"What makes you think there's any here?"

Lieutenant Redfern said in a bored tone, "You going to unlock that elevator, or you want us to use an axe for a key?"

"Be my guest," Ross said, crossing to the elevator and unlocking it with a small silver key.

Two of the policemen were ordered by the lieutenant to stay downstairs and detain for questioning anyone who entered the club. The other four, including the pair who carried axes, crowded into the elevator with Redfern and Ross. When Sam Black raised his brows in mute inquiry as to whether or not Ross wanted him to come along too, the gambler gave a slight shake to his head.

Lieutenant Redfern looked thoughtful when the doors closed and, instead of one-way view glass, he was confronted by opaque metal. His expression turned glum after they got off the car at the second floor. Stopping in the archway of what had been the gaming room, he surveyed the small orchestra stand with a piano and microphone on it, and the linen-covered tables spaced uniformly about the room.

"We use this room for overflow from downstairs," Ross explained blandly.

The lieutenant snapped orders and his squad began a thorough search

of the room. After ten minutes of wall tapping, they gave up.

Grimly Lieutenant Redfern strode back into the small second-floor lobby and marched to the open door of one of the poker rooms. The round table was covered by a linen cloth and was set with silver service for eight.

"Private dining room," Ross offered helpfully.

Ordering his men to stay in the lobby, the lieutenant checked the small barroom, the other poker room and Ross's office. When he finished, he marched into the elevator cage without comment. His four men trailed after him, then Clancy Ross.

"Up," Redfern said sourly.

Obediently Ross punched the button numbered "three."

The search of Ross's third-floor apartment proved as unproductive as the search of the second floor. As the police silently filed into the elevator again, Ross asked the lieutenant curiously, "What were you looking for here?"

"Gambling equipment," Redfern snapped.

"In my apartment?"

"I'm searching the entire building."

"Just for gambling equipment?"

The lieutenant looked at him suspiciously. "What else?"

Ross shrugged as he pushed the main-floor button. "A cop named Morton was around last night looking for some woman fugitive I'd never heard of. I thought maybe

you had some wild idea that I'd taken up harboring criminals."

"I wouldn't put it past you," Redfern said. "But my orders are just to confiscate gambling equipment."

Thirty minutes later the lieutenant and his squad had covered the rest of the building, including the basement. They failed to turn up anything even as sinister as a pair of dice or a deck of cards.

As Redfern gathered his squad together to leave, Ross said politely, "Better luck next time, Lieutenant."

The lieutenant grinned at him sourly. "You know, I like you in a begrudging sort of way, Clancy. But I'd pass up my next promotion to nail you solid on a gambling charge."

"I like you too, Lieutenant," Ross said. "I hope you make Captain, so you can sit at a desk and don't have to go out on these exhausting raids."

6.

As soon as the police had left, Ross called Sam Black over to the bar for a conference.

After telling him what had transpired at Bix Lawson's apartment, the gambler said, "Apparently Sergeant Morton was here last night as an emissary of Lawson's instead of in his official capacity as a cop. Redfern didn't know anything about a beef from Blair City on the girl jumping bond. I've a hunch there

never was a beef on it, which means there probably isn't even a warrant out for her. I doubt that the Blair City police know she left town. Where do you have her?"

"In a furnished room down on the South Side."

Ross looked thoughtful. "Now that the police have already checked my apartment, they aren't likely to again. And, as long as Bix Lawson's search for the girl is unofficial, none of his stooges can get in. I think she'd be safer back here."

"If you want it that way," Sam said.

"Then snap to it," Ross said briskly. "Soon as you get her back here, I have another chore for you."

"Just ask me."

"You're going on a little vacation," his employer informed him. "You're going to Blair City."

7.

Sam Black returned with Janice Talbot shortly after one P.M. The girl's luggage consisted of only a single traveling bag, and Sam carried it into the apartment's guest bedroom.

A few minutes later, after final instructions from Ross as to what he was supposed to do after he got there, Sam left to catch a train for Blair City.

The gambler asked Janice if she had yet had lunch and, when she said no, he phoned the night club kitchen for lunch to be sent up for

both of them. They ate tête-à-tête on a card table in the front room instead of at the long dining-room table. Afterward they sat about idly listening to some of the records in the gambler's collection.

In the middle of the afternoon the phone buzzed and Ross answered it at the extension phone on the bar. The call was from a raspy-voiced man who identified himself only as "Whisper."

"The word is out that there's a war on between you and Bix Lawson," Whisper said cautiously.

"Yes?" Ross asked noncommittally.

"Just wondered if you knew it yet."

"I did," the gambler said. "That tip isn't worth a nickel."

"That ain't the tip," Whisper said. "Your joint is going to get messed up by a grenade after closing tonight."

After a moment of silence, Ross said, "That's worth a C. Pick it up from the headwaiter any time."

When Whisper rang off, Ross remained staring thoughtfully off into space for a few moments. Suddenly he grew conscious that Janice had crossed the room and was standing quietly next to him.

When he glanced at her, the blonde girl said, "That call was more trouble, wasn't it?"

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"Your expression. You look as though you were getting ready to

kill somebody. I've caused you an awful lot of trouble, haven't I, Clancy?"

He softened his expression by grinning at her. "How's that?"

"When Sam brought me up, we stopped by your office first to see if you were there. I noticed the gaming room was shut down, and the two poker rooms were made up to look like dining rooms. You've had to close down your whole business on account of me."

"Not the legitimate part of it," Ross denied. "Periodic shutdowns are an occupational hazard in the gambling racket. Don't worry about it."

"But I do," she insisted. "Last night in bed I got to thinking about what it will mean to you to clash with Bix Lawson. And all over me. If you'd turned me over to that policeman last night, you wouldn't have any of this trouble. That phone call was more trouble, wasn't it? Are you going to get in a gang war with Lawson?"

"Not a gang war," Ross said. "I don't own a gang. Unless you count Sam, and he just left for Blair City."

"You mean you're going up against Lawson's gang all alone?"

"I've been against it all alone for some years now," Ross said. "I'm the only independent operator in the system. We've clashed before."

In a wondering voice the girl said, "Yesterday you'd never even seen me before. But just because I'm in trouble, you're willing to risk

everything you have, including your life, to help me. Why do you go to so much trouble for a stranger?"

"You're not a stranger. You're Jim Talbot's wife."

"His widow," the girl corrected. "Jim told me how wonderful you'd be, but I never quite believed him until now. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you in gratitude."

She was looking up at him so seriously, Ross laughed aloud. Janice flushed and looked puzzled.

"What's so funny?"

Ross said dryly, "If you're offering me your all in payment for services rendered, heroines only do that in dime novels. And heroes only nobly refuse in the same novels. Me, I'm a heel. You're an exceptionally beautiful gal, and if you keep up that talk, you'll suddenly find yourself in the bedroom."

Her flush deepened, but her gaze remained steady. "I meant exactly what I said. Anything."

"Just in gratitude?"

For a considerable time she stared at him before answering. Presently she said, "That's part of it, I suppose. Not entirely. I'm human too."

"With Jim dead only a little over a week?" he asked curiously.

"But dead forever," she said in a definite tone. "I'm not callous. I'll grieve for Jim a long time. But I'm realist enough to know he's gone for good. You can't be untrue to a dead man."

"No," he agreed.

He gave her another grin, but this

time there was an element of weighing estimation in it. When his eyes slowly moved over her from head to foot, she accepted the examination as an invitation to move into his arms.

For a moment he merely held her loosely, looking down into her face. But to the man's surprise, even that mild physical contact started to do something to her. Under his gaze her eye pupils gradually dilated and her body began to tremble uncontrollably.

Then her lips came up to his greedily.

8.

A hand grenade exploding in the center of an empty room can do a lot of damage. The furnishings of Club Rotunda were expensive, and in addition to tables and chairs, there were mirrors, draperies, the solid glass bar and the bottled stock on the back bar to consider. Metal fragments from an exploding grenade could wreck all of this.

Ross toyed within the thought of closing early and taking the precautionary measures of removing most of the furniture and placing some kind of shield in front of the bar. But he knew that during the inevitable police investigation which would follow the bombing, the police would be bound to ask embarrassing questions about why he didn't report his advance knowledge if there was any indication that he

had expected attack. In the end he decided to leave things as they were.

He had no desire to risk the lives of any of his help, however. Shortly before the closing hour of one-thirty, he told his headwaiter he wanted all personnel out of the place by a quarter of two.

"But we can't get cleaned up by then, sir," the headwaiter protested.

"Skip the cleaning," Ross said. "By fifteen minutes after closing I don't want a soul on the first floor."

The headwaiter shrugged.

Then Ross phoned his apartment and told Janice he didn't want her to stir from the place no matter what happened.

"You may hear a little noise later on," he said. "And after that see a few cops milling around in the street. But just stay put. Nothing can happen to you up there."

"All right, Clancy," she said in a small voice.

The only direction from which the attack could come was from the front of the building. While several windows faced the alley, they gave access only to the kitchen, the rest rooms and the dressing rooms used by the floor show. There was a glass entrance to the club on one side of the building, but it led only into a small lobby and not into the main room. On the opposite side the club had a joint wall with the theater next door. The only way a bomber could get a grenade into the main

room was by hurling it through the plate-glass window in front.

As soon as the last of his employees had departed and the club was locked up for the night, Ross got his Lincoln from the club parking lot and parked it on the street running alongside of the club. He faced it toward the street running in front of the club, so that by merely driving a few feet and then turning either left or right, he would be able to take off after the bomber's car instantly, no matter which direction it came from.

With the motor running, he sat in the car and waited.

While he was sure the car he expected would have to stop squarely in front of the club when it finally got there, its approach might be from any of four directions. Therefore every time headlights approached him from the front or the rear, he dropped sidewise in the seat so that it would appear the Lincoln had no one in it. He didn't bother when cars approached the intersection from either his right or left, as their headlights didn't touch his car.

It was three thirty in the morning and Ross had been up and down in the front seat a dozen times when the car he was waiting for finally arrived. It came from his front, its headlights sweeping into the Lincoln's front seat as Ross lay sidewise. The instant the arc of the lights told him the car had turned left in front of the club, he came erect

again and shifted into "drive."

Though the car was now around the corner where he couldn't see it, he could hear that it had halted. He heard one of its doors open, there was the crash of glass, and then the car gunned away. Its motor was roaring at top speed before the dull explosion came from within the building.

Ross nosed his Lincoln to the intersection in time to see the bomber's tail light swing left at the next block. Without switching on his lights, he took off in pursuit with his throttle to the floorboards. He made the next intersection in time to see the red tail light turn right another block farther on.

Apparently the driver of the other car felt that this maneuvering was enough to throw off any possible pursuit. Even this small bit of evasion was probably the result of habit rather than fear, as there was no reason for the bomber to expect immediate pursuit.

After his second turn, the other driver dropped his speed to the legal limit and drove straight north for several blocks. At Green Street he turned left to Eighth Street, then north again. A block and a half behind him Ross followed without lights.

When the other car began to slow down just short of the James Harvey housing developments, Ross switched on his dimmers and closed the distance between them. The bomber's car pulled over to the curb and

parked.

Apparently the occupants of the bomb car were so sure they couldn't have been followed, they only glanced casually at the Lincoln as it neared. As Ross drew abreast, both men had gotten out of the car and were approaching another car parked immediately in front of it.

Obviously the car used in the bombing was a stolen one, it was now being abandoned and the men were switching to their own car.

Ross pulled ahead of the second car, braked and neatly backed in to the curb. The two men were still unsuspecting, probably assuming he was a resident of the developments coming home late. Both men were on the street side of the car, the driver in the act of opening the front door and the other man opening the rear door to lay on the floor a box he was carrying, when Ross stepped from the Lincoln.

Before either recognized who he was, they were covered by his .38 automatic.

The two men stared at him stupidly. The driver was a small, slightly-built man with narrow features and a weak chin. The other man had the battered appearance of an ex-heavyweight fighter. Both were strangers to Ross, but apparently they knew who he was.

The driver said in a panic-stricken squeak, "Clancy Ross!" and the heavier man stared at him unbelievingly.

Ross eyed the cardboard carton

the big man still held in his hands. "Brought a whole case of grenades along, did you?" he asked. "How many left in the box?"

The big man wet his lips and remained silent. After a moment Ross let his eyes harden over, centered his pistol on the man's belt buckle and drew the hammer back from quarter cock to full cock.

At the ominous click the man said hurriedly, "Five, Mr. Ross."

"Put them on the rear floor as you started to," Ross ordered.

When the man had obeyed, the gambler glanced up and down the street, and seeing it was deserted, ordered both men to lean forward on their hands against the side of the car. While they were in this defenseless position, he expertly frisked them, found a pistol on each and tossed them onto the back seat.

"Now both of you climb in front," he said.

When they were side-by-side in the front seat, Ross slid into the back. The two men faced forward and Ross talked to the backs of their heads.

"Where you boys from?" Ross asked.

When neither answered, the gambler said matter-of-factly, "That's the last time I ask a question twice. Next time I don't get an answer fast, I'll blow holes in both your heads."

"Chicago," the small driver squeaked.

"Imported specifically for this job?"

"Yes, sir."

"By Bix Lawson?"

Again the driver said, "Yes, sir."

"How'd you get here so fast?"

Ross asked curiously. "Bix couldn't have started planning this much before noon today."

In a trembling voice the driver said, "He phoned and we took a plane. It's only a couple of hours."

After a few moments of silence, Ross asked, "Know what I'm going to do to you?"

"No, sir."

"I'm going to give you a sporting chance to get out of town alive. What do you say to that?"

The driver gulped and said, "Thank you, sir."

"Maybe you won't feel so grateful when you learn what the chance is. I'll give you boys two choices. The first is for the three of us to drive down to the river and for me to drive back alone. The other's to do exactly what I say for about an hour, and then get turned loose. Which do you pick?"

"The second," the driver said promptly.

"You too?" Ross asked the other man.

"Yeah," the big man said.

"Know where the Club Silhouette is?" Ross asked the driver.

"No, sir."

"On Green just this side of Grand. Take a run over that way."

The driver started the car. En route to their destination there was no conversation. As they approached

the club, Ross ordered the driver to double-park in front of it and leave the motor running.

"Bix Lawson owns half interest in this club," Ross informed his companions. "Plus half interest in a couple of others named the Ranch House and the Golden Dog. You, hefty. Know what you're going to do now?"

The big man shook his head.

Reaching into the carton on the floor, Ross handed a grenade into the front seat. "You're going to step out of the car long enough to heave this through the plate-glass window in front. If I don't like your marksmanship, you get a bullet in the middle of the back. Everything clear.

"Yeah," the big man said huskily.

"Then get moving."

Pushing open the car door, the big man stepped out on the sidewalk. Carefully withdrawing the grenade's pin, he sent it hurtling through the plate glass window and leaped back into the car. Immediately the small driver gunned the car forward, and they were nearly to the corner before the explosion sounded.

As they rounded the corner on two wheels, Ross said, "Now you can head for the Ranch House over on Spruce Street."

9.

Thirty minutes later Ross had himself dropped back at his Lincoln.

After getting out of the other car, he stood next to it a moment studying the two men through the open window.

"Has it occurred to you what Bix Lawson is going to think about all this?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," the driver said. "He ain't going to like it."

"That's an understatement," Ross informed him cheerfully. "If he ever catches up with you two, you'll both be wearing cement overshoes."

"Yes, sir."

"So what are your plans?"

"To get out of town right now, and stay out."

"Bix pay you in advance?"

Sadly the small man shook his head. Now that it seemed the gambler had no intention of killing him, his courage was rapidly returning. "Maybe you'd want to come up with a small fee for what we did for you, Mr. Ross," he suggested.

Ross let his eyes freeze over and the man hurriedly said, "I was just kidding."

Tentatively he shifted into "drive," glanced at the gambler to see if there was going to be any objection, and when there wasn't, slowly pulled away. From a slow start he gradually increased speed until, a block away, he had the gas pedal flat to the floor.

When the car disappeared from sight, Ross went over and climbed into his Lincoln.

There were police all over the place when Ross returned to Club

Rotunda. He came in by the alley door after parking his car in the club parking lot, and found the first floor ablaze with lights. Sergeant Morton, his nose plastered with adhesive tape and both eyes blackened, was in charge of the investigation.

When the sergeant spotted Ross in the center of the room surveying the damage, he came over to him and demanded, "Where you been?"

"Out for a ride," the gambler said mildly. "What happened?"

"Somebody tossed a grenade," Morton said with a barely concealed smirk. "Wonder who?"

Ross shrugged. "I couldn't imagine."

"Probably some out-of-town mob," the sergeant said, enjoying himself. "But don't you worry. We'll do everything possible to catch the bomber."

"I never worry," Ross told him.

The damage was as extensive as Ross had expected. Aside from the wreckage of tables and chairs, three panels of the glass bar were cracked, two huge wall mirrors shattered, the baby grand piano on the orchestra stage damaged, several drapes shredded beyond repair, and the back-bar was a shambles of broken glass and spilled liquor. There was some consolation in the fact that at least the major part of the loss would be covered by insurance, however.

Ross said to Morton, "If you don't need me for anything, I'm going up to bed. I suppose you'll want me to stop down at headquarters later on

to make some kind of statement."

"Sure," the sergeant said indulgently. "Get a little sleep. This afternoon will be all right."

It was nearly five-thirty when Ross switched on the light in his bedroom. He found he had company. Janice sleepily opened hereyes and looked at him.

Slipping off his topcoat, Ross inquired, "Get tired of the guest room?"

"I got scared at all the commotion downstairs," she said. "What happened?"

"Bix Lawson had a couple of mugs mess the club up to teach me a lesson. It didn't. There's nothing to worry about."

"Want me to go back to the guest room?" she asked.

"Not unless you snore."

The girl said she didn't.

10.

Ross slept till noon, had a combination breakfast and lunch and appeared at headquarters at one P.M. He was questioned by Lieutenant Niles Redfern in the presence of Sergeant Morton.

When the gambler kept repeating that he could give no suggestion whatever as to who had bombed his place, Redfern said sourly, "Must be some out-of-town mob trying to muscle in here. Three other clubs besides yours got messed up last night. I'd be tempted to think Bix Lawson had some hand in this, ex-

cept that he's got a heavy financial interest in the other three clubs."

Ross glanced at Morton, whose face was glum. In a bland tone the gambler said, "Sergeant Morton suggested last night that it was probably some out-of-town gang. Need me any more, Lieutenant?"

"Nope," the lieutenant said. "We'll get in touch with you if we want you again."

The rest of that day Ross was busy with repair contractors and interior decorators over restoration of the club. It wasn't until after seven that the last of them had left and the club was locked up for the night. Ruefully he surveyed the boarded-up front window for a final time, then went upstairs for dinner with Janice.

Ross had suggested having a caterer send in food for the duration of the girl's stay, as the club kitchen would be closed down while the downstairs was undergoing repair. But she told him she preferred to do the cooking herself. There was plenty of food available from the downstairs freezer and the apartment had a fully-equipped kitchen. The girl said it would give her something to do to combat the boredom of being confined to the apartment.

She was an excellent cook, Ross discovered. She had stuffed and roasted a chicken, and with it had baked sweet potatoes, corn and a tossed salad. The meal was topped off by fresh apple pie.

Afterward they sat lazily in the

front room, Ross sipping a weak scotch and water and Janice imbibing a Coke. Watching the girl, Ross began to wonder if he were missing something by not having a wife around the place.

"You don't drink at all, do you, Janice?" he asked suddenly.

"No," the girl said.

"Or smoke?"

She shook her head.

"There aren't many girls left that old-fashioned."

She smiled at him. "You make me sound stuffy."

"You definitely aren't that," he said, remembering the girl's passion when he had first kissed her yesterday. A passion which seemed to him to grow more unrestrained every time he had touched her since.

The phone buzzed and Ross crossed to the bar to answer it.

An operator's voice said in his ear, "Blair City calling Mr. Clancy Ross, sir."

"Speaking," Ross said. "Go ahead, operator."

The call was from Sam Black. "I got all the dope on the case from that Homicide cop you told me to see," he said. "Also I talked to a half dozen neighbors in the apartment building where the Talbots lived, cruised all the bars around there asking questions, and picked up some underworld grapevine dope from a stoolie your cop friend steered me to."

"How's it shape up?" Ross asked.

"Hold onto your hat," Sam said.

"This is going to lift your hair straight up."

And for ten minutes he rattled off a detailed report.

When he finished, Ross said quietly, "Thanks, Sam. You've done a fine job."

"I suppose I'm a sort of a genius," Sam admitted modestly.

When he hung up the phone, Ross walked over to stand next to Janice's chair and looked down at her broodingly.

When she looked back at him questioningly, he said, "That was Sam Black calling from Blair City. I sent him up there to try to track down Jim's killer, you know."

"I knew you sent him," she said. "You didn't tell me what for."

"He did a pretty thorough job for such a short time," Ross said. "Matter of fact, his report makes it pretty obvious who the killer was."

She looked surprised. "Who, Clancy?"

"The same person the police charged," he said flatly. "You."

Her eyes widened. "Me? Are you serious?"

"The reason the cops arrested you wasn't just because you'd been overheard having an argument with Jim," Ross said. "That was only one of a million arguments. Usually over the same old things. Your excessive drinking and other men."

Her face blank, she continued to stare at him.

"Just an old-fashioned girl," he said. "The reason you haven't taken

a drink since you've been here is that you can never stop at one. Every tavern in your neighborhood knows what a lush you are. You were even a member of Alcoholics Anonymous for three months, until you decided drinking was too much fun to give up. And your neighbors know of at least three extra-marital affairs you've had, which probably means there were a dozen more they don't know about."

She said in a tight voice, "Did you also find out that Jim was impotent?"

The question jolted him. "Impotent?" he repeated.

"An after-effect of that wound he got in Korea. It came on gradually, starting only two months after we'd been married. By the time we'd been married six months, he wasn't even part of a man any more." Her voice rose thinly. "But you think he'd give me a divorce? No. Instead he was going to get himself cured. There was hope after a couple of more years of treatment, the doctors kept telling him. Just hope. No guarantee of a cure. Just hope. And I was supposed to exist on that. You know why I drank so much? Because it was a substitute for men. The only way I could make myself stay true to Jim. What do you think of that?"

Ross ran his fingers through his silvery hair, paced over to the fireplace and back again. He said, "Impotency happens to be a ground for divorce in Missouri. You didn't

have to kill him."

"I didn't kill him," she said.

"Yes you did," he told her. "You thought it would be a perfect opportunity. He was under police protection as a material witness in a gang killing, and you thought every one would assume that friends of the gangster on trial had him killed. You left your back door unlocked so it would seem that it had been picked, and shot him with his own gun. But the police couldn't find any marks on the lock to indicate it had been picked, and when they checked into your varied love life, they arrested you for murder. They made a thorough enough investigation, and it's been double-checked by Sam Black. The underworld grapevine in Blair City has it that Bix Lawson had nothing to do with Jim's murder."

"Then why did he get me out on bond so he could fake a suicide for me?" she demanded. "Or don't you believe that's what he intended?"

"That's what he intended," Ross agreed. "That's the only point on which you told the truth. You put him in a spot. He'd never have ordered Jim killed, because even with Jim's positive identification of Skat Owens as Shelly's killer, his testimony would have been counteracted by the five reliable witnesses who insisted Skat spent all that day with them in a poker game. Even the best of witnesses can make mistakes in identification, and the jury would have had to conclude that Jim made

one. But if you came to trial and used the defense that Jim was probably killed to prevent him testifying against Skat Owens, everyone in town would know about it. And after that you couldn't find a juror from among Blair City's residents who wouldn't vote for conviction against Skat. Bix wanted to wind the case up by having you knock yourself off all right. But you created the situation that made this necessary, not Bix."

"You can't prove it!" Janice said.

"I don't have to prove it. This isn't a court of law. All I have to do is to be convinced, and I'm convinced."

"You still can't do anything about it."

"Oh, but I can," Ross assured her. "I went to a lot of trouble for you, and I don't like to be taken for a sucker. I guess Jim told you I have a habit of going all out for my friends, which is why you came running to me for help. But he must not have told you about another characteristic I possess."

"What's that?"

"I've got about as much compassion for my enemies as a Nazi storm trooper."

Walking over to the phone, he dialed a number. The girl listened as Ross said, "Hello, Diana? Let me speak to Bix, please."

Then he said, "No, not tonight. Maybe tomorrow I'll be free. I'll talk to you later. Put Bix on."

After a short wait, he said, "Clancy, Bix." There was a pause, then, "Keep your pants on long enough to listen. Why didn't you tell me what the real story was on Janice Talbot before we both cost each other so much money?"

There was another pause, then, "I'm calling it even. If you want to play some more, I'll be glad to oblige you. But it seems like a lot of unnecessary trouble. You can come up to my place and pick up Mrs. Talbot any time you're ready. Preferably right now."

There was a sentence or two more of what sounded to the girl like amiable conversation before Ross hung up.

When he walked back over to her chair and stood looking down at her, she whispered, "You wouldn't do that, would you, Clancy? Not really."

"I've already done it," he said indifferently. "They'll be over after you in twenty minutes."

"You . . . you could do a thing like that? After what's been between us?"

"Sure," he said, grinning without humor. "You think I've stayed the only independent gambler in town for all these years by being soft?"



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YOU, detective

7.—The Outside Job

BY WILSON HARMAN

SERGEANT PHIL HAMMOND looked at the three people standing against the fireplace opposite him. "You called the police when you couldn't find John Barbour?" he asked.

The tall blonde said: "That's right, Sergeant. Marcia Hunt and Art, here — prevailed upon me to telephone you. I thought, since they weren't familiar with the grounds here, they might have missed him. I didn't imagine he was — dead."

"Mr. Wallis and Miss Hunt went out to look for your husband, Mrs. Barbour?" Hammond asked. "Didn't you go along?"

"I've been ill," the blonde said. "I haven't been out of the house for days. I haven't even been out of this room, Sergeant, since early this morning."

"That's right," the short, dark man said angrily. "And it's this — damned woman who made her ill." He glared angrily at the little brunette who stood near him.

"Don't, Art," the blonde said. "We needn't give the sergeant our secrets."

"Of course not," Marcia Hunt said flatly. "The sergeant might dislike you. He might think you had a motive for killing your husband. Jealousy, you know . . ."

"Marcia!" Mrs. Barbour said.

"It's true, Sergeant," the brunette continued. "John and I were in love, and she knew it. We've had a few — encounters over it."

"Miss Hunt," Hammond started. "Where were you when John Barbour died?"

"I was in my room," the brunette said. "I'm on the top floor, two stories up. I was listening to the radio. I can tell you what programs I heard . . ."

"She must have done it," Art Wallis said. "I was down at the gate, talking to the gatekeeper there, until Ellen called me from the house. Of course, Ellen couldn't go out. That leaves only Marcia . . ."

"Excuse me," Ellen Barbour said quietly. She went to a chair against the wall and sank into it, spots of mud from her shoes marking her careful movements. "I've been very ill, you know."

"We'll make this as quick as we can," Hammond said. "Mr. Wallis: did any one come in or go out while you were at the gate?"

"No one," Art said. "And this place is surrounded by an electrified fence. The front gate's the only way in. The gatekeeper will testify to all this."

Hammond turned to a patrolman standing nearby. "Check that," he said. The man left silently. Hammond turned back to the waiting three. Before he could say a word Ellen Barbour's thin voice broke the silence:

"Art's right, Sergeant. It must have been Marcia . . . she left the light on in her room, probably left the radio playing . . . there was a light in her window. She went out and . . . killed John."

"It's possible," Hammond said. He turned to the dark man. "Mr. Wallis, you inherit a good deal of money, I understand."

"One hundred thousand dollars," Art said. "I certainly wouldn't have killed for it. John and I were good friends. He invited me up every weekend — though he'd never invited Marcia Hunt before. He must have thought her being here would be — well, amusing. He had an odd sense of humor."

"Very odd," Marcia Hunt said, her voice brittle. "Sergeant, we loved each other. I wouldn't have killed him . . ."

The patrolman returned, interrupting her with: "The gatekeeper confirms everything."

"Good," Hammond said. "That's fine." He looked around the room, at the faces of Ellen Barbour, Marcia Hunt, Art Wallis lit by nervously flickering firelight. "It's all over," Hammond said. "I've found the murderer."



The woman only wanted Manning to get a gun for her. It looked like a simple enough job . . .

A Complete Novel

BY CHARLES WILLIAMS

IT WAS incredible. There were no signs of violence or even sickness aboard the ship, and the Gulf itself had been calm for weeks. Her sails were set and drawing gently in the faint airs of sunset, her tiller lashed, and she was gliding along on a southeasterly course which would have taken her into the Yucatan Channel. Her dinghy was still there, atop the cabin, and everything was shipshape and in order except that there was not a soul on board.

She was well provisioned, and she had water. The two bunks were made and the cabin swept. Dungarees and foul weather gear hung about the bulkheads, and in one of the bunks was the halter of a woman's two-piece bathing suit. And, subtly underlying the bilge and salt-water smells, there still clung to the deserted cabin just the faintest suspicion of perfume. It would have gone unnoticed except that it was so completely out of place.

The table was not laid, but there were two mugs on it, and one of them was still full of coffee. When the hard-bitten old mate in charge of the boarding party walked over and put his hand against the coffee

pot sitting on one burner of the primus stove it was slightly warm. There had been somebody here less than an hour ago.

He went over to the small table where the charts were and opened what he took to be the log book, flipping hurriedly through to the last page on which anything was written. He studied it for a moment, and then shook his head. In forty years at sea he had never encountered a log entry quite like it.

" . . . the blue, and that last, haunting flash of silver, gesturing as it died. It was beckoning. Toward the rapture. The rapture . . . "

Before he closed the book he took something from between the pages and stared at it. It was a single long strand of ash blonde hair. He shook his head again.

Putting the book under his arm, he picked up the small satchel which had been lying in the other

Flight to



bunk and jerked his head for the two seamen to follow him back on deck.

A few yards away in the red sunset the master of the American tanker *Joseph H. Hallock* waited on her bridge for the mate to come aboard.

Freya, of San Juan, P.R., it said under her stern, and the master of the tanker studied her curiously while he waited for the mate. She was a long way from home. He wondered what she was doing this far to the westward, in the Gulf of Mexico, and why a small boat from Spanish Puerto Rico should have been named after a Norse goddess.

The mate came up on the bridge carrying the big ledger and the satchel. "Sick?" the captain asked. "Or dead?"

"Gone," the mate said, with the air of a man who has been talking to ghosts without believing in them. "Just gone. Like that."

"Two of 'em, as near as I can figure it," he went on, sketching it tersely. "A man and a woman, though there wasn't much in the way of women's clothes except half a bathing suit. One or both of 'em was there not over an hour ago."

"Well, as soon as you get that line on her we'd better go back and see," the captain said. "Anything in the log?"

"Gibberish," the older man replied. He passed over the book, and then the satchel. "Cap, you ought to be thankful you've got

an honest mate," he said, nodding toward the little bag. "Just guessing, I'd say there's about fifty thousand dollars in there."

The captain pursed his lips in a silent whistle as he opened the bag to stare briefly at the bundles of American currency. He looked outward at the *Freya*, where the men were making the towline fast, and frowned thoughtfully. Then he opened the big journal at the page the mate indicated and read the last entry.

He frowned again.

The rapture . . .

When there was no longer any light at all and they had given up the search for any possible survivors and resumed their course, the captain counted the money in the presence of two of the ship's officers and locked it in the safe. It came to eighty-three thousand dollars. Then he sat down alone in his office and opened the journal again. . . .

2.

It was a hot, Gulf Coast morning in early June. The barge was moored out on the T-head of the old Parker Mill dock near the west end of the waterway. Carter had gone to New Orleans to bid on a salvage job and I was living on board alone. I was checking over some diving gear when a car rolled out of the end of the shed and stopped beside mine. It was a couple of tons of shining Cadillac, and there was a girl in it.

She got out and closed the door and walked over to the edge of the pier with the unhurried smoothness of poured honey.

"Good morning," she said. "You're Mr. Manning, I hope?"

I straightened. "That's right," I said, wondering what she wanted.

She smiled. "I'd like to talk to you. Could I come aboard?"

I glanced at the spike heels and then at the ladder leaning against the pier, and shook my head. "I'll come up."

I did, and the minute I was up there facing her I was struck by the size of her. She was a cathedral of a girl. In the high heels she must have been close to six feet. I'm six-two, and I could barely see over the top of the smooth ash blonde head.

Her hair was gathered in a roll very low on the back of her neck and she was wearing a short-sleeved summery dress the color of cinnamon which intensified the fairness of her skin and did her no harm at all in the other departments.

Her face was wide at the cheekbones in a way that was suggestively Scandinavian, and her complexion matched it perfectly. She had the smoothest skin I'd ever seen. The mouth was a little wide, too, and full lipped. It wasn't a classic face at all, but still lovely to look at and perhaps a little sexy. Her eyes were large and gray, and they said she was nice.

It was hot in the sun, and quite

still, and I was a little uncomfortable, aware I'd probably been staring at her. "What can I do for you?" I asked.

"Perhaps I'd better introduce myself," she said. "I'm Mrs. Wayne. Shannon Wayne. I wanted to talk to you about a job."

"What kind of job?" I asked.

"Recovering a shotgun that was lost out of a boat."

"Where?" I asked.

"In a lake, about a hundred miles north of here —."

I shook my head. "It would cost you more than it's worth."

"But —," she protested, the gray eyes deadly serious. "You wouldn't have to take a diving suit and air pump and all that stuff. I thought perhaps you had one of those aqua-lung outfits."

"We do," I said. "In fact, I've got one of my own. But it would still be cheaper to buy a new shotgun."

"No," she said, "Perhaps I'd better explain. It's quite an expensive one. A single-barreled trap gun with a lot of engraving and a custom stock. I think it cost around seven hundred dollars."

I whistled. "How'd a gun like that ever fall in a lake?"

"My husband was going out to the duck blind one morning and it accidentally fell out of the skiff."

I looked at her for a moment, not saying anything. There was something odd about it. What kind of fool would be silly enough to take a

\$700 trap gun into a duck blind? And even if he had money enough to buy them by the dozen, a single-barreled gun was a poor thing to hunt ducks with.

"How deep is the water?" I asked.

"Ten or twelve feet, I think."

"Well, look. I'll tell you how to get your gun back. Any neighborhood kid can do it, for five dollars. Get a pair of goggles, or a diving mask. You can buy them at any dime store. Go out and anchor your skiff where the gun went overboard and send the kid down to look for it. Take a piece of fishline to haul it up with when he locates it."

"It's not quite that simple," she said. "You see, it's about three hundred yards from the houseboat to where the duck blind is, and we're not sure where it fell out."

"Why?" I asked.

"It was early in the morning, and still dark."

"Didn't he hear it?"

"No. I think he said there was quite a wind blowing."

It made a little sense. "All right," I said. "I'll find it for you. When do we start?"

"Right now," she said. "Unless you have another job."

"No. I'm not doing anything."

She smiled again. "That's fine. We'll go in my car, if it's all right with you. Will your equipment fit in back?"

"Sure," I said.

I got my gear and changed into some sports clothes. She handed me

the car keys and I put everything in the trunk.

As soon as we were out the gate she fumbled in her bag for a cigarette. I lit one for her, and another for myself. She drove well in traffic, but seemed to do an unnecessary amount of winding around to get out on the right highway. She kept checking the rear-view mirror, too, but I didn't pay much attention to that. I did it myself when I was driving. You never knew when some meathead might try to climb over your bumper.

When we were out on the highway at last she settled a little in the seat and unleashed a few more horses. We rolled smoothly along at 60. It was a fine machine, a 1954 hardtop convertible. I looked around the inside of it. She had beautiful legs. I looked back at the road.

"Bill Manning, isn't it?" she asked. "That wouldn't be William Stacey Manning, by any chance?"

I looked around quickly. "How did you know?" Then I remembered. "Oh. You read that wheeze about me in the paper?"

It had appeared a few days ago, one of those interesting-character-about-the-waterfront sort of things. It had started with the fact that I'd won a couple of star class races out at the yacht club; that I'd deck-handed a couple of times on that run down to Bermuda and was a sailing nut; that I'd gone to M.I.T. for three years before the war. It was a good thing I hadn't said any-

thing about the four or five stories I'd sold. I'd have been Somerset Maugham, with flippers.

Then an odd thought struck me. I hadn't used my middle name during that interview. In fact, I hadn't used it since I'd left New England.

She nodded. "Yes. I read it. And I was sure you must be the same Manning who'd written those sea stories. Why haven't you done any more?"

"I wasn't a very successful writer," I said.

She was looking ahead at the road. "Are you married?"

"I was," I said. "Divorced. Three years ago."

"Oh," she said. "I'm sorry. I mean, I didn't intend to pry —."

"It's all right," I said. I didn't want to talk about it.

It was just a mess but it was over and finished. A lot of it had been my fault, and knowing it didn't help much. Catherine and I hadn't agreed about my job, my interests in boating or writing — or anything. She'd wanted me to play office politics and golf. We finally divided everything and quit.

I had learned diving and salvage work in the Navy during the war, and after the wreckage settled I drifted back into it, moving around morosely from job to job and going farther south all the time. If you were going to dive you might as well do it in warm water. It was that aimless.

She looked at me and said, "I

gathered you've had lots of experience with boats?"

I nodded. "I was brought up around them. My father sailed, and belonged to a yacht club. I was sailing a dinghy by the time I started to school. After the war I did quite a bit of ocean yacht racing, as a crew member. And a friend and I cruised the Caribbean in an old yawl for about eight months in 1946."

"I see," she said thoughtfully. "Do you know navigation?"

"Yes," I said. "Though I'm probably pretty rusty at it. I haven't used it for a long time."

I had an odd impression she was pumping me, for some reason. It didn't make much sense. Why all this interest in boats? I couldn't see what blue-water sailing and celestial navigation had to do with finding a shotgun lost overboard in some piddling lake.

3.

She never did say anything about herself, I noticed, and I didn't ask. She always kept working the conversation around to me, and inside an hour she had most of the story without ever seeming actually to be nosy.

We went through another small town stacked along the highway in the hot sun. A few miles beyond the town she turned off the pavement onto a dirt road going up over a hill between some cotton fields.

We passed a few dilapidated farmhouses at first, but then they began to thin out. It was desolate country, mostly sand and scrub pine, and we met no one else at all. After about four miles we turned off this onto a private road which was only a pair of ruts running off through the trees. I got out to open the gate. There was a sign nailed to it which read: *Posted. Keep Out.* I gathered it was a private gun club her husband belonged to, but she didn't say. Another car had been through recently, probably within the last day or two, breaking the crust in the ruts.

We went on for about a mile and then the road ended abruptly. She stopped. "Here we are," she said.

It was a beautiful place, and almost ringingly silent the minute the car stopped. The houseboat was moored to a pier in the shade of big moss-draped trees at the water's edge, and beyond it I could see the flat surface of the lake burning like a mirror in the sun.

She unlocked the trunk and I took my gear out. "I have a key to the houseboat," she said. "You can change in there."

She led the way, disturbingly out of place in this wilderness with her smooth blonde head and smart grooming, the slim spikes of her heels tapping against the planks. I noticed the pier ran on around the end of the scow at right angles and out into the lake.

"I'll take the gear on out there,"

I said. "I'd like to have a look at it."

She came with me. We rounded the corner of the houseboat and I could see the whole arm of the lake. This section of the pier ran out into it about thirty feet, with two skiffs tied up at the end. The lake was about a hundred yards wide, glassy and shining in the sun between its walls of trees, and some two hundred yards ahead it turned around a point.

"The duck blind is just around that point, on the left," she said.

I looked at it appraisingly. "And he doesn't have any idea at all where the gun fell out?"

She shook her head. "No. It could have been anywhere between here and the point."

It still sounded a little odd, but I merely shrugged. "All right. We might as well get started. I'd like you to come along to guide me from the surface. You'd better change into something. Those skiffs are dirty and wet."

"I think I've got an old swimsuit in the houseboat. I could change into that."

"All right," I said. We went back around to the gangplank and walked aboard. She unlocked the door. It was a comfortably furnished five-room affair. She pointed out a room and I went in to change. She disappeared into another room. She was a cool one, with too damned much confidence in herself, coming out to this remote place with a man she didn't even know.

Cool wasn't the word for it. I could see that a few minutes later when she came out on the dock while I was getting the skiff ready. She could make your breath catch in your throat. The bathing suit was black, and she didn't have a vestige of a tan; the clear, smooth blondness of her hit you almost physically. There was something regal about her—like a goddess. I looked down uncomfortably and went on bailing. She was completely unconcerned, and her eyes held only that same open friendliness.

I fitted the oarlocks and held the boat while she got in and sat down amidships. Setting the aqualung and mask in the stern, I shoved off.

We couldn't have been over seventy-five yards off the pier when I found the gun. If I'd been looking ahead instead of staring so intently at the bottom I'd have seen it even sooner. It was slanting into the mud, barrel down, with the stock up in plain sight. I pulled it out, kicked to the surface and swam to the skiff.

Her eyes went wide and she smiled when she saw the gun. "That was fast, wasn't it?" she said.

I set it in the bottom of the boat, stripped off the diving gear, and heaved that in too. "Nothing to it," I said. "It was sticking up in plain sight."

She watched me quietly as I pulled myself in over the stern. I picked up the gun. It was a beautiful trap model with ventilated sight-

ing ramp and a lot of engraving. I broke it, swishing it back and forth to get the mud out of the barrel and from under the ramp. Then I held it up and looked at it. She was still watching me.

The barrel could conceivably have stayed free of rust for a long time, stuck in the mud like that where there was little or no oxygen, but the wood was something else. It should have been waterlogged. It wasn't. Water still stood up on it in drops, the way it does on a freshly waxed car. It hadn't been in the water 24 hours.

I thought of that other set of car tracks, and wondered how bored and how cheap you could get.

4.

She pulled us back to the pier. I made the skiff fast and followed her silently back to the car, carrying the diving gear and the gun. The trunk was still open. I put the stuff in, slammed the lid, and gave her the key.

Why not, I thought savagely. If this was good clean fun in her crowd, what did I have to kick about? Maybe the commercial approach made the whole thing a little greasy, and maybe she could have been a little less cynical about waving that wedding ring in your face while she beat you over the head with the stuff that stuck out of her bathing suit in every direction, but still it was nothing to blow your top

about, was it? I didn't have to tear her head off.

"You're awfully quiet," she said, the gray eyes faintly puzzled.

This was the goddess again. She was cute.

"Am I?" I asked.

We walked back to the pier and went into the living room of the houseboat. She stopped in front of the fireplace and stood facing me a little awkwardly, as if I still puzzled her.

She smiled tentatively. "You really found it quickly, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said. I was standing right in front of her. Our eyes met. "If you'd gone further up the lake before you threw it in it might have taken a little longer."

She gasped.

I was angry and I stuck my neck out another foot.

"Things must be pretty tough when a woman with your looks has to go this far into left field —"

It rocked me, and my eyes stung; a solid hundred and fifty pounds of flaming, outraged girl was leaning on the other end of the arm. I turned around, leaving her standing there, and walked into the bedroom before she decided to pull my head off and hand it to me. She was big enough, and angry enough.

I dressed and was reaching for a cigarette when I suddenly heard footsteps outside on the pier. I held still and listened. They couldn't be hers. She was barefoot. It was a man. Or men, I thought. It sounded

as if there were two of them. They came aboard and into the living room, the scraping of their shoes loud and distinct in the hush. I stiffened, hardly breathing now.

Detectives? Wayne himself? Suddenly I remembered the way she'd doubled all over town getting out on the highway and how she'd kept watching the rear-view mirror. I cursed her bitterly and silently. This was wonderful. This was all I lacked — getting myself shot, or named co-respondent in a divorce suit. And for nothing, except having my face slapped around under my ear.

I looked swiftly around the room. There was no way out. The window was too small. I eased across the carpet until I was against the door, listening.

"All right, Mrs. Macaulay," a man's voice said. "Where is he?"

Mrs. Macaulay? But that was what he'd said.

"What do you want now?" Her voice was a scared whisper. "Can't you ever understand that I don't know where he is? 'He's gone. He left me. I don't know where he went. I haven't heard from him —'"

"We've heard that before. You've made two trips out here in 24 hours. Is Macaulay here?"

"He's not up here, and I don't know where he is —"

Her voice cut off with a gasp, and then I heard the slap. It came again. And then again. She apparently tried to hold on, but she

began to break after the third one and the sob which was wrung from her wasn't a cry of pain but of utter hopelessness. I gave it up then too, and came out.

There were two of them. The one to my left lounged on an armchair, lighting a cigarette as I charged into the room. I saw him only out of the corners of my eyes because it was the other one I wanted. He was turned the other way. He had her down on the sofa and off balance with a knee pressed into her thighs while he held her left wrist and the front of her bathing suit with one hand and hit her with the other. He wasn't as tall as she was, but he was big across the shoulders.

I caught the arm just as he drew it back again. He let her go. Even taken by surprise that way, he was falling into a crouch and bringing his left up as he stepped back. But I was already swinging, and it was too sudden and unexpected for even a pug to get covered in time. He went down and stayed down.

I started for him again, but something made me jerk my eyes around to the other one. Maybe it was just a flicker of movement. It couldn't have been any more than that, but now instead of a cigarette lighter in his hand there was a gun.

He gestured casually with the muzzle of it for me to move back and stay there. I moved.

I was ten feet from him. He was safe enough, and knew it. I watched him, still angry but beginning to get

control of myself now. I didn't have the faintest idea what I'd walked into, except that it looked dangerous. I couldn't place them. They weren't police. And they obviously weren't private detectives hired by her husband, because it was her husband they were looking for. Somebody named Macaulay, and she'd told me her name was Wayne. It was a total blank.

The one I'd hit was getting up. Pug was written all over him. He moved in on me clearing his head, catlike, ready. He was a good six inches shorter than I was, but he had cocky shoulders and big arms, and I could see the bright, eager malice with which he sized me up. He was a tough little man who was going to cut a bigger one down to size.

"Drop it," the lounging one said.

"Let me take him." The plea was harsh, and urgent.

The other shook his head indifferently. He was long, loose-limbed, and casual, dressed in a tweed jacket and flannels. I couldn't tab him. He might have been a college miler or a minor poet, except for the cool and unruffled deadliness in the eyes. He had something about him which told me he knew his business.

"All right," the pug said reluctantly. He looked hungrily at me, and then at the girl. "You want me to ask her some more?"

I waited, feeling the hot tension in the room. It was going to be

rough if he started asking her some more. I wasn't any hero, and didn't want to be one, but it wasn't the sort of thing you could watch for very long without losing your head, and with Tweed Jacket you probably never lost it more than once.

Tweed Jacket's eyes flicked from me to the girl and he shook his head again. "Waste of time," he said. "He'd scarcely be here, not with her boyfriend. Check the rooms, though; look at the ashtrays. You know his cigarettes."

The pug went out, bumping me off balance with a hard shoulder as he went past. I said nothing. He turned his face a little and we looked at each other. I remembered the obscene brutality of the way he was holding and hitting her, and the yearning in the stare was mutual.

There was silence in the room except for Shannon Wayne's stirring on the sofa. She sat up, her face puffed and inflamed; her eyes wet with involuntary tears. She clutched the torn strap of her bathing suit, fumblingly, watching Tweed Jacket with fear in her eyes. Tweed Jacket ignored us. The pug came back.

"Nothing. Nobody here for a long time, from the looks of it."

He looked at me hopefully. "How about Big Boy? Let's ask him." "Forget it. Stick to business."

There was no longer any doubt as to who was boss, but the pug wanted me so badly he tried once more. "This is a quiet place to ask, and he might know Macaulay."

Tweed Jacket waved him toward the door. "No," he said. His eyes flicked over the girl's figure again coolly. "It's Mrs. Macaulay he's interested in." They left.

In the dead silence I could hear their footsteps retreating along the pier, and in a moment the car started. I breathed deeply. Tweed Jacket's manner covered a very professional sort of deadliness, and it could easily have gone the other way. Only the profit motive was lacking. He simply didn't believe Macaulay was here.

I turned. She was still holding the front of the bathing suit. "Thank you," she said, without any emotion whatever, and looked away from me. "I'm sorry you had to become involved. As soon as I can change, I'll drive you back to town."

5.

It wasn't until ten, that night, that I said goodbye to Shannon Macaulay. We'd driven back to town and stopped at a cocktail lounge. She'd cleared up some of the questions that had been hanging in my mind. She did know where her husband was. He had been an insurance executive for a marine underwriters outfit in New York. He wasn't in trouble with his firm or the police. I could check that by calling them, she said. The Tweed Jacket, whose name was Barclay, represented some syndicate who were looking for her husband. Why?

She evaded that one. I wasn't satisfied with that, but I went along.

And where did I come in? Easy. The phony dive act was necessary because Shannon had to sound me out. See what kind of a guy I was. Check my experience against that article she'd read about me.

They needed more than a diver. Specifically, they wanted me to buy and outfit a boat and take them off the Yucatan coast to recover something from a sunken plane. Then I was to land them secretly in Central America. That explained her questions about my navigational experiences in the Gulf and the Caribbean. What was in it for me? She'd said, "The boat is yours. Plus five thousand dollars."

I'd whistled softly. There was nothing cheap about this deal. I could see myself cruising the world in the *Ballerina*. She was a beautiful auxiliary scoop. I'd wanted her even before she'd been put up for sale. With the *Ballerina* and five thousand bucks I could live the kind of life I always wanted. I could work and play as I pleased. Manning of the *Ballerina*.

That about clinched it. That and Shannon Macaulay. She'd been awfully good about my misunderstanding of her motives that afternoon and grateful for what I'd done.

Look, I asked myself, what was with Shannon Macaulay? I didn't know anything about her. Except that she was married. And her husband was on the lam from a bunch

of mobsters. So she was tall. So she was nice-looking. So something said sexy when you looked at her body and her face, and sweet when you looked at her eyes. I *had* seen women before, hadn't I? I must have. They couldn't be something entirely new a man 33 years old, who'd been married once for four years. So relax.

I tried to relax walking back to the pier, but it wasn't easy. I couldn't figure the Macaulay guy. What was he mixed up with? Why was he so sure he could spot the plane? How did he figure he could shake this mob with something as easy to spot as this big beautiful blonde wife of his? I knew landing them secretly in a foreign country wasn't legal. And I didn't like the possibilities of tangling with "Tweed Jacket" and his buddy again, but those were risks I'd have to take.

Relax? Hell, I'd wanted to drive her home, but I knew how stupid that was the minute I'd said it. She gave me her number and told me to watch what I said, to make it sound like a lovers' meeting in case Tweed Jacket was tapped in. We'd arrange to meet once more to give me the money I'd need. Just before she drove away, she'd thanked me, saying, "You've got to help me, Bill, I can't let him down."

6.

It was about 10:30 when I walked up to the shack at the pier.

Old Christiansen, the watchman, came out. "Fellow was here to see you, Mr. Manning," he said. "He's still out there."

"Thanks," I answered, not paying much attention. "Good-night." It was late for anybody to be coming around about a job. I entered the long shed running out on the pier. It was velvety black inside, and hot. Up ahead I could see the faint illumination which came from the opened doors at the other end. There was a small light above them on the outside.

I started over toward the ladder to the barge and then remembered that old Chris had said somebody was waiting out here to see me. I looked around, puzzled. My own car was sitting there beside the shed doors, but there was no other. Well, maybe he'd gone. But Chris would have seen him. The gate was the only way out.

I saw it then — the glowing end of a cigarette in the shadows inside my car.

The door swung open and he got out. It was the pug. There was enough light to see the hard, beat-up, fight-hungry face. He lazily crushed out his cigarette against the paint on the side of my car.

"Been waiting for you, Big Boy," he said.

"All right, friend," I said. "I've heard the one about the good little man. A lot of good little men are in the hospital. Hadn't you better run along?"

Then, suddenly, I saw him holding and hitting her again and I was glad he'd come. Rage pushed up in my chest. I went for him.

He was a pro, all right, and he was fast. He hit me three times before I touched him. None of the punches hurt very much, but they sobered me a little. He'd cut me to pieces this way. He'd close my eyes and then take his own sweet time chopping me down to a bloody pulp. My wild swings were just his meat; they'd only pull me off balance so he could jab me.

His left probed for my face again. I raised my hands, and the right slammed into my body. He danced back. "Duck soup," he said contemptuously.

He put the left out again. I caught the wrist in my hand, locked it, and yanked him toward me. This was unorthodox. He sucked air when my right came slamming into his belly. I set a hundred and ninety-five pounds on the arch of his foot, and ground my heel.

He tried to get a knee into me. I pushed him back with another right in his stomach. He dropped automatically into his crouch, weaving and trying to suck me out of position. He'd been hurt, but the hard grin was still there and his eyes were wicked. All he had to do was get me to play his way.

He was six or eight feet in front of the pier, with his back toward it. I went along with him, lunging at him with a right. It connected.

He shot backward, trying to get his feet under him. His heels struck the big 12-by-12 stringer running along the edge of the pier and he fell outward into the darkness, cart-wheeling. I heard a sound like a dropped canteloupe and jumped to the edge to look down. The deck of the barge lay in deep shadow. I couldn't see anything. I heard a splash. He had landed on the after deck and then slid off into the water.

I went after him, wild with the necessity to hurry. But the minutes it took me to break out the big underwater light and a diving mask made the difference. The ebbing tide had carried him under the pilings supporting the pier and by the time I got to him he was dead. He was caught there, his skull crushed by the fall on the deck. His eyes were open staring at me. I fought the sickness. If I gagged, I'd drown.

7.

The next thing I was conscious of was hanging to the wooden ladder on the side of the barge, being sick. I'd left him there. The police could get him out; I didn't want to touch him. I climbed up to the deck and collapsed, exhausted. I was winded, soaked and the cut places on my face were stinging with salt. My right hand was hurt and swollen.

I had to get out to the watchman's shanty and call the police. But then the whole thing caught up

with me. This wasn't an accident I had to report. I'd killed him in a fight. I'd hit him and knocked him off the pier, and now he was dead. It wasn't murder, probably, but they'd have a name for it — and a sentence.

Well, there was no help for it. I started wearily to get up, and then stopped. The police were only part of it. *What about Barclay?* And the others I didn't even know? This was one of their boys.

Suddenly, I wasn't thinking of the police any more, or of Barclay's hoodlums, but of Shannon Macaulay. And the *Ballerina*. Of course, the whole thing was off now. Even if I didn't get sent to prison, with those mobsters after me and convinced I had some connection with Macaulay I was no longer of any use to her.

No, the hell with reporting it. Sure, I regretted the whole thing. But I was damned if I was going to ruin everything just because some vicious little egomaniac couldn't leave well enough alone. Leave him down there. Say nothing about it — I stopped.

How? Christiansen knew he was in here. I was all marked up. In a few days, in this warm water, the body would come to the surface, with the back of his head caved in and bruises all over his face. I didn't have a chance in the world. He'd merely come in here to see me, and had never come out. That would be a tough one for the police to solve.

Of all the places in the world, it had to happen on a pier to which there was only one entrance and where everybody was checked in and out by a watchman — No. Wait. Not checked in and out. Just questioned as they came in. No books, no passes. And the watchman only waved them by as they went out.

It collapsed. It didn't mean anything at all, because *nobody* had gone out. Christiansen would never have any trouble remembering that when the police came checking.

There *had* to be a way out of it. I looked across the dark waterway. Everything was quiet along the other side; there was nothing except an empty warehouse, a deserted dock. Nobody had seen it. Barclay probably didn't even know the pug had come out here. He'd done it on his own because he couldn't rest until he'd humiliated a bigger man who'd knocked him down. There was nothing whatever to connect me with it except the simple but inescapable fact he'd driven in here to see me and had never driven out again —. I stopped. *Driven?* No. I hadn't seen any car. But how did I know there wasn't one out there? The shed was dark. I got a flashlight and checked. There it was in the corner of the shed. All I had to do was drive it out past the watchman, and the pug had left here alive. It was as simple as that.

Out at the gate the light was overhead, and the interior of the

car would be in partial shadow. The watchman's shack would be on the right. I could hunch down in the seat until I was about the pug's size. All the watchman ever did was glance up from his magazine and wave. He wouldn't see my face; nor remember afterward that he hadn't. It was the same car, wasn't it? The man had driven in, and after a while he had driven out.

Wait. I'd still have to get back inside without Christiansen's seeing me. But that was easy too. It must be nearly eleven now. Chris went off duty at midnight. All I had to do was wait until after twelve and come back in on the next man's shift. He wouldn't know where I was supposed to be, or care.

I walked over to the car, flashed the light in, and saw there were no keys. I leaned wearily against the door. I knew where the keys were, didn't I? It would take only a minute. Revulsion swept me.

But I knew it had to be done. I dove down, emptied his pockets, and came up to surface again. I hadn't looked at his face. It took me a few minutes to clear the gear I'd used. Then I tried to fix up my face with hot water applications. After that I changed into dry clothes that were similar in color to the ones he'd been wearing. I dried his keys and started his car.

I hunched down in the seat and drove up to the gate slowly. Chris was in the shack, pouring coffee out of a thermos. He looked over casu-

ally, waved a hand, and turned back to his coffee.

I drove the car uptown — away from the waterfront, parked it on a quiet street, and threw the key far into a vacant lot. I was free of him now, the poor little punk. *Why* couldn't he have stayed away?

8.

At twelve-thirty I stepped into an all-night drugstore and called a cab. I hoped the driver couldn't see my face.

We passed the last street and were approaching the gate.

He braked to a stop in front of the shanty. The 12-to-8 watchman was looking out the window. "Manning," I called out, keeping my face in shadow. He lifted a hand.

"All right, Mr. Manning."

The cab started to move ahead, then stopped. Somebody was calling out from the shack. "Mr. Manning! Just a minute —"

I looked around. The watchman was coming out. "I almost forgot to tell you. A woman called about ten minutes ago —"

I wasn't listening. I stared at the window of the shack. Old Chris was looking out, a puzzled frown on his face.

The other watchman was still talking. "— Chris was just about to walk out and tell you. He said you was on the barge."

I couldn't move, or speak. Chris was standing beside him now, look-

ing in at me. "Son of a gun, Mr. Manning. I didn't see you go out."

I fought to get my tongue broken loose from the roof of my mouth. "Why — I —" It was impossible to think. "Why, I came out a while ago. Remember? When my friend left. We drove out to have a couple of beers. It must have been a little before twelve —"

"You was in that car?" He peered at me dubiously. "I looked right at it, too, and didn't even see you. I must be getting absent-minded. I was about to walk all the way out there to the barge and tell you that woman called —"

He broke off suddenly, concerned. "Why, Mr. Manning. What's wrong with your face?"

I was rattled now, but I tried not to show it to these two old men who meant well, but who would remember everything they saw later on.

"Oh," I mumbled, feeling my face as if I were surprised at the fact of having one. "I — uh — I was getting something out of the store-room and fell."

"Well, that's too bad," he answered solicitously. "But you ought to put something on them cut places. Might get infected. You never know. I think it's the climate around here, the muggy air, sort of —"

"Yes," I said. "Yes. Thanks."

I got rid of the cabbie, who'd be the third guy to answer any questions asked by the police — or Barclay's bunch of killers.

I tried to think. How much chance did I have now? In a few days he'd float up, somewhere along the waterfront, and the police would start looking. One of the first things they'd do would be to question all the guards along the piers.

Float up? That was it. He couldn't float up. I had to stop it. I looked downward again, and shuddered. Could I go back into that place once more? *Once?* It would take at least a half dozen dives to do it, to make him fast with wire to the bottom of one of those pilings. Too much precious time and breath were wasted in going down and coming up.

There was just one more thing, I thought, and then we had it all. Carter would be back from New Orleans sometime this morning, here aboard the barge, and I wouldn't be able even to look.

I fought with panic. I still had a chance, I told myself. They might never connect me with it. After all, there was no identification on him now that I'd shoved the wallet into the muck. They wouldn't have a picture of him, except possibly one taken as he looked when he came up. Chris might not have had a good look at him when he came in the gate.

But I wouldn't know. That was the terrible part of it. I'd never have any idea at all what was happening until the hour they came after me.

I had to get out of here. I was

thinking swiftly now. Quit, and tell Carter I was going to New York. Sell my car, buy a bus ticket, get off the bus somewhere up the line, and come back. Buy the boat, under another name, of course. In three days I could have it ready for sea. We'd be gone before they even came looking for me. If they did.

It didn't occur to me until afterward that never once in all of it did I ever consider the possibility of not buying the boat and not taking Shannon Macaulay.

Suddenly, I had to see her. For the first time in a self-sufficient life I was all at once terribly alone, and I didn't know why, but I had to see her.

That reminded me. The watchman had said that a woman had called. I was still holding in my hand the slip of paper he had given me. It was a telephone number, the same one she had given me in the bar. Maybe something had happened to her. I ran toward the car.

Calling from the watchman's shack would be quicker, but I didn't want the audience. I slowed going through the gate, and the graveyard watchman lifted a hand and nodded. I noted bitterly that old Chris had gone home at last.

I pulled up at the nearest bar and called her. She answered, finally, her voice tense. We put on the lovers' rendezvous tone to take care of possible listeners. She arranged to meet me at the cocktail joint we'd drunk at earlier in the day.

I was sitting in the car in front of it when she pulled up and parked her Caddy. If she were being followed I didn't want to go inside where they might get a look at my marked-up face. I eased alongside. She saw me, and slipped out on the street side and got in. It had taken only seconds.

I shot ahead, watching the mirror. There were cars behind us, but there was no way to tell. There are always cars behind you. I was conscious of the gleam of the blonde head beside me, and a faint fragrance of perfume.

She noticed my face and gasped. *Tell her?* What kind of fool would tell anybody? I had known her less than twenty-four hours; I knew practically nothing about her; I knew she had gotten me into this mess; yet I would have trusted her with anything. I told her. I brushed off her sympathetic offerings, but I didn't find them unpleasant.

I had been watching the mirror carefully. By this time we were well out on the beach highway and traffic had thinned out considerably. There were three cars behind us. One of them stopped. I shot ahead fast, dropping the other two well behind me. As they disappeared momentarily behind some dunes, I slowed abruptly and swung away from the beach. We were some 50 yards from the road, well out of range of passing highlights. I shut the headlights before we stopped rolling.

She started to light a cigarette. "Not yet," I said. Both cars went by, their tail-lights slowly receding down the road.

I lit her cigarette.

"All right, listen," I said. I told her what I was going to do. "There's only one catch to it," I finished. "You'll have to give me the money for that boat with no guarantee you'll ever hear from me again. The word of a man you've known for one day isn't much of a receipt."

"It's good enough for me," she said quietly. "If I hadn't trusted you I would never have opened the subject in the first place. How much shall I make the check?"

"Fifteen thousand," I said. "The boat is going to be at least ten, and there's a lot of stuff to buy. When we get aboard I'll give you an itemized statement and return what's left."

"All right," she said.

"Pick a name," I said. "How about Burton? Harold E. Burton."

She wrote out the check. I held it until it dried, and put it in my wallet. "Now. What's your address?"

"106 Fontaine Drive."

"All right," I said, talking fast. "I should be back here early the third day. This is Tuesday now, so that'll be Thursday morning. The minute the purchase of the boat goes through and I'm aboard I'll mail you an anniversary greeting in a plain envelope, just one of those dime-store cards. I don't see how

they could get at your mail, but there's no use taking chances. Other than that I won't get in touch with you. I'll be down there at the boat yard all the time. It's in another part of the city, and I won't come into town at all. I've only been around Sanport for about six months, but still there are a few people I know and I might bump into one of them. I'll already have everything bought and with me except the stores, and I'll order them through a ship chandler's runner —"

"But," she interrupted, "how are we going to arrange getting him aboard?"

"I'm coming to that," I said. "After you get the card, you can get in touch with me, from a pay phone. It's Michaelson's Boat Yard; the name of the sloop is *Ballerina*. I'm just hoping I can get her. She was still for sale last night. But if something happens and she's already sold by the time I get back, I'll make that card a birth announcement instead of an anniversary greeting, and give you the name of the one I actually do buy. All straight?"

"Yes," she said. She turned a little and I could see the blur of her face and the pale gleam of the blonde head. "I like the whole plan, and I like the way your mind works." She paused for a moment, and then added quietly. "You'll never know how glad I am I ran into you. I don't feel so helpless now. Or alone."

I was conscious of the same thing,

but probably in a different way than she'd meant it. There was something wonderful about being with her. For a moment the whole mess was gone from my mind.

"You were good on the phone, too," she said. "Thanks for understanding."

In other words, *keep your distance, Buster*. I wondered why she thought she had to warn me. We both knew it was only an act, didn't we? Maybe I was always too aware of her, and she could sense it. "All right. Now," I said curtly. "That leaves the problem of getting him aboard. I'll have to work on that. He's in the house, isn't he?"

"Yes," she said, surprised. "How did you know?"

"Guessing, mostly. You said they'd searched it while you were gone. They wouldn't have had to tear it up much, looking for a grown man. So maybe he told you they had."

"You're very alert. He heard them and told me."

"Why is he hiding there? And how?"

She leaned forward a little and continued. "I've been wanting to get to this. Here's the whole story, briefly.

"About three weeks ago my husband spotted them on the street and knew they'd caught up with us again. He had a plan for getting to Central America and losing them completely, for the last time. It was about completed. It involved

a man who'd been a close friend of my husband's in college. He lives in Honduras and is a wealthy plantation owner with considerable political influence. He's also a rather passionate flying fan. He's always buying planes in the States and having them flown down to him, and my husband was to take this one to him. It would get him out of the country without any trail they could follow, you see? He'd merely take off without filing a flight plan, and disappear. It would be illegal, but as I say this friend of his had political connections.

"However, he had to go alone. It was a light plane and its cruising radius with the maximum amount of fuel was still a little short, so he'd added an extra tank. I was to come later, making sure I wasn't followed. I was to do it over the Memorial Day weekend, and it involved about five different zig-zagging commercial flights with the reservations made considerably ahead of time. On a long holiday like that they'd be sold out, you see? Anyone trying to follow me might catch a no-show at one or even two of the airports, but not all of them.

"Two days before I was to leave, my husband came back. He crashed off the Yucatan coast, but got into a life raft and was picked up by a Sanport fishing boat. They docked at night and he got home unseen.

"But now they've found out where we live, and they have the

place surrounded. Barclay rented the house right across the street, and they watch me all the time, waiting for me to lead them to him —"

"And they don't know he's inside?"

"I don't think so. You see, they searched it the first time while he was actually gone. They made it look like burglary."

"But didn't you say they'd searched it again today? Yesterday, I mean?"

She nodded. "He's in a sealed-off portion of the attic, and the only way into it is through the ceiling of a second-floor closet. He stays up there nearly all the time. All the time when I'm out of the house. I think they're pretty sure he's gone, but they know if they keep watching me I'll lead them to him sooner or later. I hadn't realized until what happened up at the lake that they might try beating me up. That scares me, because frankly I don't know how much of it I could take."

That angered me and made me realize how much more there was to this girl than her looks. No whining, no heroics — she simply said she didn't know how much of it she could take and went right on with what she had to do. The next time that pug looked at me, I'd look back.

She went on. "And as to what's in the plane, it's money. About eighty thousand dollars. All he has

left. He can't take much more, Bill. That plane crash did something to him — and being brought back to Sanport after he thought he had gotten away. And losing the money on top of it, so he couldn't even run any more."

"But you just wrote a check for fifteen thousand —"

"I know. Naturally, he left me some so I could follow him. I sold my jewelry, and borrowed on the car."

I began to catch on then. She was merely handing me the last chance they'd ever have. This girl was a plunger, and when she said she trusted you she trusted you all over.

"Well, wait," I said. "I can probably find a cheaper boat —"

She shook her head. "I don't want to go to sea in a cheap boat. And we'll recover the money from the plane, anyway."

"Do you realize the jam you'll be in if I turn out to be a phony?"

"That was the general idea, Bill, when I said I wanted time to make up my mind about you. Remember?"

"I remember," I said. "Do you mind if I get a little personal? I've been feeling sorry for Macaulay because he was up against a rough proposition alone. I'd like to amend that; I don't know of anybody who's less alone."

She didn't answer for a moment, and I wondered if I'd gotten it off as lightly as I intended. After all, this was an awkward situation for

her, and she'd already shown me the road signs once.

It was almost too fast for me then. She slid toward me on the seat, murmuring, "Bill . . . *Bill!*" her face lifted to mine and her arms slipping up around my neck, and then I was overboard in a sea of Shannon Macaulay. Yet even as I swam into that sea, my mind was trying to tell me it was an act and that the reason she was saying my name over and over was to keep me from having my head blown off. And that's what it was.

A voice said, "All right, Jack. Break it up and turn around."

I turned. A light burst in my face, and another voice I recognized as Barclay's said, "You people are oversexed, aren't you?"

Two thoughts caught up with me at once. The first was that they hadn't heard us and didn't suspect anything. Her reaction time had been so fast they'd caught us kissing, just as you'd have expected of two people in a parked car along the beach. That was good.

But it was the second one that pulled the ground from under me. They had that light right in my face, and they'd be blind if they didn't see the marks that pug had left on it.

I had never been more right. "Hmmmmmm," Barclay said softly. "So that's where he went."

"Who?" I asked, just stalling for time. I had to think of something. "What are you talking about?"

"Don't be stupid. The guy you hit, up at the lake."

If I denied it they wouldn't believe me anyway, and when he didn't show up they'd go out there and ask the watchmen. They'd know then I'd done something to him. There was a better way: talk like a loud-mouthed fool, and admit it. It didn't have much chance, but at least it had more than the other.

"If that's who you mean," I said. "He did. I guess you haven't seen *his* face. Keep him out of my hair or he's going to be bent worse than that the next time you get him back."

"Where is he now?"

"How would I know?" I said. "Was he supposed to tell me his plans?"

"Skip it, wise guy," he said. "And get out of town. We're too busy to be chasing around after your love instincts. Get out of the car."

I didn't want to, but I got out. I heard her shaky indrawn breath as I closed the door. "*No. No. No —.*"

It was a good, cold-blooded, professional job. Nobody said anything. Nobody became excited. I never did even know for sure how many there were besides Barclay. I swung at the first dark shape I saw, because I had to do something; the blackjack sliced down across the muscles of my upper arm and it became a dangling, inert sausage stuffed with pain.

They gave me a good working over. The last thing I heard was Shannon's screams.

When I came to, she was there on her knees beside me, helping. My arm was numb and I felt sick, but she rested there until the pain subsided.

9.

Driving back to town, neither of us said anything about the way she'd put on the kissing act to keep my head from being blown up.

Finally, I asked, "What did Macaulay do to them?"

She hesitated.

"It's all right," I said. "If it's none of my business —."

"No," she said slowly, staring ahead at the headlights probing the edge of the surf. "It isn't that. It's just that I don't know the whole story myself."

"Didn't he tell you?"

"Most of it. But not all. He says I'll be safer if I never know. It happened about three months ago. He had to go to the Coast on business, for about a week, he said. But three days later he called me late one night, from San Antonio, Texas. I could tell he was under a bad strain. He said for me to pack some bags, and leave right away for Denver. He didn't explain; he just said he was in trouble and for me to get out of New York fast.

"He met me in Denver. It was something that happened at a party he went to, in some suburb of Los Angeles. He didn't want to talk about it, but he finally admitted a

man had been killed, and he had seen it."

"But," I said, "All he has to do is go to the police. They'll protect him. He's a material witness."

"It's not that simple," she said. "One of the people involved is a police captain."

"Oh," I said.

It sounded too easy and too pat, but on the other hand there wasn't any doubt she was telling the truth. But what about Macaulay himself?

"How long have you been married?" I asked.

"Eight years."

"And he's been with that marine insurance firm all the time?"

"Yes," she said. "He's been with them ever since he came out of law school, back in the thirties, except for three years in the service during the war."

I shook my head. There was nothing in that. We came into the almost deserted town. I stopped beside her car and got out with her. She put out her hand. "Thanks," she said. "It'll be bad, waiting for that card."

There was nobody on the street. I was still holding her hand, hating to see her leave. But all I said was, "Don't go out of the house at night while I'm gone. If you have to come downtown, do it during rush hours when there are lots of people on the streets."

"I'll be all right," she said.

"If you see a car behind you on the way home, don't worry about

it. It'll be mine. That's all."

I followed her out. It was an upper-bracket suburb out near the country club. She pulled into a drive and stopped under a carport beside a two-storied Mediterranean house with a tile roof and ironwork balconies. I stared at the house across the street. The windows were all dark. But they were in there, watching her as she got out of the car and fumbled in her bag for the key. She waved a white-gloved hand, and went inside.

I went on, looking the place over. It was the second house from the corner. I turned at the intersection and drove slowly down the side street. There was an alley behind the house. A car was parked diagonally across the street from the mouth of it in the shadows under the trees, and as I went past I saw a man's elbow move slightly in the window. They had it covered front and back. There'd be one at the other end of the alley.

All I had to do was get Macaulay out of there alive. And by that time they'd be after me too.

I made my plans quickly. I drove back to the barge, packed my stuff, cleaned my face up as well as I could. It was morning when I started into town. I thought about the guy under the pier and then tried to dismiss him from my mind. Shannon helped. I couldn't push her out of the picture at all — nor could I forget Macaulay. His story didn't jell. I knew something about that tricky

coastline off Central America. He'd have to be a superb navigator to find that spot again.

I sold my Oldsmobile for half of what it was worth and bought a bus ticket to New York. Before I got on the bus, I sent a telegram to Carter explaining that I had to see sick relatives in New York and that he'd have to get a new diver. It was the least I could do.

I fell asleep the minute I hit the seat.

10.

We came into New Orleans at ten-fifteen P. M. Through passengers going east were scheduled to change buses, with a layover of forty minutes. I got my bag, ducked out a side door, and caught a cab. I registered as James R. Madigan at a little hotel and went to work on the marks on my face. Another few hours and they'd hardly be noticed.

They might find out I'd left the bus, and they might even trail me to this hotel and eventually start looking for somebody named Madigan, but there the whole thing would end. Harold E. Burton was only a check for \$15,000, and the last place they'd ever expect me to go would be back to Sanport.

I studied the rest of it. There'd be the station wagon I had to buy to get back to Sanport with all the gear. I'd store it in a garage after we sailed. After a year or so they'd probably sell it for the storage

charges, and if anybody ever bothered to look into it all he'd find would be that it had been left there by a man named Burton who'd sailed for Boston in a small boat and never been heard of again. People had been lost at sea before, especially sailing alone.

After I'd landed them on the Central American coast, I'd return to Florida and could lose myself among the thousands who made a living along the edge of the sea in one way or another, gradually building up a whole new identity. I burned my identification. I fell asleep thinking of Shannon.

It was a little after eight when I awoke. I shaved hurriedly, noting my face was almost back to normal now, and dressed in a clean white linen suit.

A little later, I put in a long distance call to Sanport, to the yacht broker. I told him I was interested in the *Ballerina*. He said it was available at eleven thousand dollars. I arranged to meet him at Michaelson's yard in Sanport at nine the next morning.

When the banks opened I went into the first one I came to, endorsed the check for deposit, and opened an account, asking them to clear it with the Sanport bank by wire. They said they should have an answer on it by a little after noon.

The used car lots were next. Part of my mind had been occupied with the problem of getting Macaulay out of that house, and now I was

starting to see at least part of the answer. I didn't want a station wagon; I wanted a black panel truck. I found one in the next lot. After trying it out, I told the salesman I'd come back later and let him know. I couldn't buy it until the check cleared.

The wire came back from the Sanport bank a little after one. I cashed a check for three thousand, picked up the truck, and drove over to a nautical supply store. It took nearly two hours to get everything I needed here, chronometer, sextant, azimuth tables, nautical almanacs, charts, and so on, right down to a pair of 7 x 50 glasses and a marine radio receiver. That left the diving gear. Of course there was still the aqualung in the back of her car, but the coast of Yucatan was too far to come back for spare equipment if anything went wrong. I bought another, and some extra cylinders which I had filled. At five o'clock the truck was full of gear, and nothing remained but to check out of the hotel and start back.

No, there was one thing more. I went into a dime store and bought an anniversary greeting card.

I drove all night.

At dawn, I hit the outskirts of Sanport where Michaelson's Boat yard was located. I parked the car and went into a diner for breakfast. When the workmen started to drift into the yard, I walked in and got a

look at the *Ballerina*. She was a beauty.

The yacht broker showed up and we closed the deal for \$10,500. I checked the work list with the foreman and for a shakedown cruise the following morning. She was in such good shape that he guaranteed she'd be ready for me that same afternoon. Looking her over, I agreed.

Just then the telephone rang. The girl at the desk said, "Just a minute, please." She looked inquiringly at the super. "A Mr. Burton —?"

"Here," I said. "Thank you."

"Burton speaking," I said.

"Can you talk all right from there?" she asked softly.

I couldn't, so I got her number, walked down to a pay booth and dialed, fumbling in my eagerness. She answered immediately.

"Bill! I'm so glad to hear you —"

It struck me suddenly she didn't have to act now, as she had the other night, because there was no chance anybody could be listening. Then I shrugged it off. Of course she was glad. She was in a bad jam, and she'd had two days of just waiting, biting her nails.

"I didn't do wrong, did I?" she went on hurriedly. "But I just couldn't stand it any longer. The suspense was driving me crazy."

"No," I said. "I'm glad you didn't wait for the card. I was worried about you, too. Has anything happened?"

"No. They're still watching me, but I've been home nearly all the

time. But tell me about you. And when can we start?"

"Here's the story," I said, and I told her. We set the sailing date for Saturday night.

And then she asked the big question.

"Have you thought of anything yet? I mean for getting Francis aboard?"

"Yes," I said. "I've got an idea. But something else has occurred to me."

"What's that, Bill?"

"Sneaking him aboard isn't the big job. Getting you here is going to be the tough one."

"Why?"

"They're not sure where he is. But they're covering you every minute."

I went on, talking fast, checking with her about the layout of the house and the streets in the neighborhood.

Finally, I said, "all right. That's about all I needed to know. I think we can pull it off, but I want to work on it a little more. And I've still got to figure out a way to get you."

"And your diving equipment," she said. "It's still in the back of the car."

"I know," I said. "I was just coming to that. There won't be time to fool with it, either, when I come to get you, no matter what kind of plan we work out. Anyway, put that aqualung in a cardboard carton and tie it. Pack what clothes

and toilet articles you can get into another carton, and put both of them in the trunk of your car. Around noon tomorrow call Broussard & Sons, the ship chandlers, and ask if they'll deliver a couple of packages to the *Ballerina*, along with the stores. They will, of course. But don't take them to Broussard's yourself.

"Take the car to the Cadillac agency for a supposed repair. As soon as you get inside on the service floor, call a parcel delivery service to come after the cartons. Whoever's following you will be outside and won't see the things come out of your car. If he did they'd be hot on the trail in nothing flat to see where they went. All straight?"

"Yes. Now, when will I call you again?"

"Saturday afternoon about five, unless something happens and you have to get in touch with me sooner."

It took the rest of the morning to check the gear on the sloop and make out a stores list. Broussard's runner came down in the afternoon and picked it up. The yard closed at five. I drove the truck inside and parked it. The night watchman was another problem; as fast as I solved one I had two more to take its place. I had to get them aboard without his seeing them.

I studied the layout of the yard. The driveway came in through the gate where the office and the shops were located, and went straight back

to the pier running out at the end of the spit. The *Ballerina*, of course, would be out on the pier after I brought her back in from the shake-down. If I backed the truck up to the pier and left the lights on he wouldn't be able to see them come out the rear doors.

I cleaned the cabin of the boat that night and got a good night's sleep.

The *Ballerina* checked out beautifully the next morning and the yardwork was done. I paid the bill and spent the afternoon checking and stowing all the gear aboard her. Later, I bought a paper, but there was nothing about his body's being found.

With nothing to do, I began thinking of her again. I still hadn't figured a way of getting her aboard. Finally I hit on an idea. If it worked, this time tomorrow we'd be at sea.

11.

The stores came down in a truck at a little after nine. I looked quickly for the two cartons, took them aboard, and started checking stores with the driver. When he had it all on the end of the pier I wrote out a check and started carrying it aboard.

I was still at it at eleven o'clock when two strange men came into the yard. They were dressed in seer-sucker suits and panama hats, and were smoking cigars. They started around the yard, talking to each

of the workmen for a minute or two.

Then they were coming toward me. I was just picking up a coil of line; I straightened, watching them. I'd never seen them before as far as I could tell. They showed me a photograph, questioned me briefly, and left.

They worked fast. It couldn't possibly have been more than a few hours since they'd found him, and already they had a picture. Not a picture, I thought. Probably dozens of them, being carried all over the waterfront. And it was a photograph of him as he was alive, not swollen and unrecognizable in death.

Anybody but a fool would have known it, I thought. The pug would have a criminal record, and when they have records they have pictures. Maybe they had identified him from his fingerprints. But that made no difference now. The thing was that Christiansen would recognize him instantly.

I shook it off. They'd still be looking for Manning, who had gone to New York. And we'd be gone from here in another twelve hours. I was still tense and uneasy. It was Saturday afternoon, and it grew worse as the afternoon wore along.

It was exactly five o'clock when the telephone rang inside the booth at the gate.

"Bill," she said softly, "I'm getting really scared now. Are we all ready?"

"We're all ready," I said. "Listen. I've got to get Macaulay first.

They're not sure where he is, and if it works right they won't even know he's gone. They won't suspect anything's happening. But when you disappear, everything's going to hit the fan."

"I understand," she said.

I went on, "Tell him to dress in dark clothes and wear soft-soled shoes. He's to come out the back door at around 9:10. That'll give him plenty of time to get his eyes accustomed to the darkness and make sure there's nobody in the alley itself. I don't think there will be, because they're too smart to be loitering where somebody might see them and call the police. They're watching the ends of it, sitting in cars. I'll come down Brandon Way and stop at the mouth of the alley at exactly 9:20 —"

"But, Bill, you can't stop there. He'll know what you're doing. He'll kill you."

"He'll be busy," I said. "I've got a diversion for him, and I think it'll work. Now, the truck will be between him and the mouth of the alley. Tell Macaulay to come fast the minute the truck stops. And if anything goes wrong he's to *keep coming toward the truck*. If he breaks and goes back he hasn't got a chance. Tell him when he reaches it to stand a little behind the door and just put his hand up on the frame of the window, near the corner. He's not to get in or open the door, until the truck starts moving. If he even puts his weight on the running

board while it's stopped, that guy may hear it. Got all that?"

"Yes," she said. "Then what?"

"You're next. Have you ever been to a drive-in movie?"

"Yes. Several times."

"All right. As soon as he leaves the house at 9:10 you lock all the doors. Be standing right by the phone at 9:20. If you hear any commotion or gunshots, call the cops and hide, fast. A prowler car will get there before they can get to you. But if you don't hear anything, you'll know he got away. Leave the house at 9:30. Some of them will follow you, of course. Go to the Starlite drive-in, out near the beach on Centennial Avenue. Centennial runs north and south. Approach from the north, and try to time it so you get there at ten minutes before ten. If you look you'll see a black panel truck parked somewhere in the last block before you get to the entrance. That'll be me. Drive on in.

"Now, all this is important. Be sure you get it right. This is Saturday night, so it'll be pretty full. But you know how they're laid out, fan-wise, spreading out from the screen, and there are always a few parking places along the edge because the angle's poor out there. Enter one of the rows and drive across to the exit, slowly, looking for a good spot. But there aren't any. So you wind up clear over at the end. Sit there twenty minutes, and then back out. You've decided

you don't like that, and there must be something better further back. So drop back a row and go back to the entrance side again. Park there for five or ten minutes, and then get out and walk down to the ladies' room in the building where the projector is. Kill about five minutes and then come back to the car. The minute you get in, back out and drive toward the exit. Before you get to it, pull into one of the parking places along the edge, and step out, on the right-hand side. Don't scream when a hand grabs your arm. It'll be mine."

"Won't they still be following me?"

"Not any more," I said. "By the time you come back from the ladies' room I'll know who he is."

"You think he'll get out of his car too?"

"Yes. It's like this. There'll probably be two cars trailing you. When they see you go into a drive-in theatre one man will follow you in to be sure it's not a dodge for you to transfer to some other car. And the other bunch will stay outside near the exit to pick you up coming out, because there's a hellish jam of cars fighting for the exit when the movie breaks up and they could lose you if they both went inside. There's just one thing more. If an intermission comes along, sit tight where you are. You've got to make those two moves and that trip to the powder room while the picture's running and not many people are wandering

around. It's darker then too; nobody has his lights on."

"Yes, but how are you going to stop him from following me the second time? Bill, they're dangerous."

"It's all right," I said. "He won't even see me. When he gets out to follow you on foot I'll fix his ignition wires. By the time he tumbles to the fact his car's not going to start, you'll already be down at the other end of the row and in my truck. When the picture's over, we just drive out, along with everybody else."

"All right. But you'll be careful, won't you?"

"Why?" I asked. I couldn't help it.

"Couldn't we put it this way — if anything happens to you we wouldn't get away."

"We'll call it that."

"Yes," she said. Then she added, "That, at the very least."

She hung up.

12.

I sweated it out. It was eighty-five when I reached the neighborhood and cruised slowly to time it right. I was betting a lot on just a flashlight and a black panel truck. The thing was to give him just a little time to look it over, so I wouldn't spring it on him too suddenly. He'd be able to see what I was doing, and as I passed under the street light at the intersection of

Fontaine Drive he'd see the black sides of the truck. My headlights would cover the Louisiana license plate. At 9:18 I eased away from the curb.

Switching on the flashlight, I held it in my left hand and shot the beam into dark places under the trees and back among the hedges as I came slowly down the street. After I crossed Fontaine I could see him. He was in the same place, facing this way. I flashed the light into another hedge.

I had to calculate the angles fast now. I was well out in the center of the street, watching the mouth of the alley on his side. He was parked just beyond it. I stopped with my window opposite his, and at the same time I threw the light against the side of his car but not quite in his face.

"You seen anything of a stray kid?" I asked, as casually as I could with that dryness in my mouth. "Boy, about four, carrying a pup —"

It worked.

I could feel the breath ooze out of me as a tough voice growled from just above the light. "Nah. I haven't seen any kid."

"Okay. Thanks," I said. I felt along the edge of the window frame in the opposite door. *Hurry. For the love of God, hurry.*

My fingertips brushed across a hand. I inhaled again.

I let the truck roll slowly ahead three or four feet, and said, "If you see a kid like that, call the station,

will you? We'd thank you for it."

I moved the light away from him. He wouldn't be able to see anything for twenty or thirty seconds, and Macaulay was on the far side of the truck, walking along with me. But he had to be in it before we hit the street below Fontaine, under the light. I slipped the clutch and hit the accelerator a couple of times, shooting the flashlight beam along the sidewalk. The door opened soundlessly, and he was sitting beside me. He closed it gently.

There was no outcry behind us. I wanted to step on the gas. Not yet, I thought. Easy. I still hadn't seen him at all. He was only a dark shadow beside me as we rolled on toward the intersection. Then a cigarette lighter flared.

I jerked my face around, whispering fiercely. "*Put that —*"

"It's all right," a smooth voice said. "Just turn at the corner and go around the block."

I saw a lean face, and tweed, and the gun held carelessly in his lap. It was Barclay.

We turned. I was numb all over and there was nothing else to do.

"Park at the mouth of the alley, and do it quietly," Barclay said.

"Mrs. Macaulay?" I asked mechanically.

"She's in the house."

"Is she all right?"

"Yes."

I swung around the next corner, and we were on Fontaine, under the big, peaceful trees. "Then you

finally killed him didn't you?"

"Oh. Yes," he replied, almost as if talking to himself. "Too bad."

There was no point in asking what he meant. I was too far behind now to catch up in a week. We parked at the mouth of the alley. Across the street I could see the red tip of a cigarette in the other car. Bitterness welled up in me. I'd fooled them, hadn't I?

Barclay opened the door on his side. "Go in. We'll be leaving soon."

"Leave?"

"Sail. *Ballerina* sleeps four, right?"

He stepped aside in the darkness and followed closely behind me. My mind turned the parts of it over and over with no more comprehension than a washing-machine tumbling clothes. Sail? Four of us? Macaulay was already dead, that was what they'd wanted, wasn't it?

It was — unless she had been lying all the time. I tried to shove the thought out of my mind. It came back. How would they have known I was coming by in the truck unless she had told them?

Maybe I could have got away from him in the alley, but I didn't even try. The whole thing had fallen in on me, and I didn't have anywhere to go. I wanted to see her, anyway. She had lied about it, or she hadn't lied about it. I had to know.

I had wanted to see Macaulay and when I finally saw him he was a corpse on the floor of his living

room. He'd been dressed according to the instructions I'd given Shannon. She was there, shocked and speechless, barely able to keep herself together when Barclay escorted me in. Two of his friends were there, too. He gave his instructions tersely.

"Very well. We're finished here," he said. "Who has the keys to her car?"

"Here." The big blond guy fished them from his pocket.

"Give them to Carl," Barclay directed crisply. "You'll go with us in the truck."

He shifted his gaze to the other man. "Take the Cadillac downtown and park it. Meet us on the southeast corner of Second and Lindsay. We'll be going east, in a black panel truck, Manning driving. Get in the front seat with him. When we go in the gate at the boat yard Manning will tell the watchman you've come along to drive the truck back to a garage. If Manning tries any tricks, don't shoot him; kill the watchman. As soon as we're all aboard the boat, take the truck to some all-night storage garage and leave it, under the name of Harold E. Burton, and pay six months' storage charges in advance. Then pick up the Cadillac, drive it to the airport, and leave it. Take a plane to New York, and tell them we should be in Tampa in three weeks to a month. Tell them about Macaulay, but that we have her and it's under control. You got that?"

"Check," Carl said. He took the keys and went out.

I could see a little of it now. They were hanging it on her quite neatly. The police already wanted me, and they'd be after her now too, for killing Macaulay. I didn't know what Barclay wanted with her, but he had her from every angle. There was nowhere we could run.

13.

We boarded the *Ballerina* the way Barclay scheduled it and he used my loading plan perfectly. The watchman never suspected a thing. Carl drove the truck off the pier and that was it. I could have jumped over the side and possibly escaped, but he knew I wouldn't. I had nowhere to go, with the police looking for me, and I couldn't leave her. The big one helped her down into the cockpit.

On deck, Barclay said, "Let's sail."

"Where?" I asked.

"I'll give you a course when we're outside. Now, step on it."

"I'll have to light the running lights first. Is that all right with you?"

"Certainly."

"I just wanted to be sure I had your permission."

He sighed in the darkness. "This is no game, Manning. You and Mrs. Macaulay are in a bad spot. What happens to her depends on the way the two of you cooperate. Now,

get this sloop away before the watchman hears us and comes snooping."

Getting the watchman killed would accomplish nothing. "All right," I said. We moved slowly away from the pier, out toward the channel, going seaward. There was no other traffic.

Barclay sat down across from me in the cockpit, smoking. "Very neat," he congratulated himself above the noise of the engine.

"I suppose so," I said. "If killing people is your idea of neatness."

"Macaulay? We couldn't help it."

"Of course," I said coldly. "It was an accident."

"No. Not an accident. Call it calculated risk." He paused for a moment, the cigarette glowing, and then he went on. "And speaking of that, here's where you fit in. You're also a calculated risk. I can handle small boats well enough to take this sloop across the Gulf, but I couldn't find the place we're looking for. We need you. We won't kill you unless we have to. Score yourself a point.

"But before you start anything, imagine a bullet-shattered knee, with gangrene, and only aspirin tablets or iodine to treat it. And figure what we could do to Mrs. Macaulay if you don't play ball.

"One of us will be watching you every minute. Do as you're told, and there'll be no trouble. Is it all clear, Manning?"

"Yes," I said. "except you keep telling me this is no game, so there must be some point to it. Would

you mind telling me where you think you're going, and what you're after?"

"Certainly. We're looking for an airplane."

"You mean the one Macaulay crashed in? You're going to try to find it after you've killed the one person on earth who knew where it is?"

"She knows," he said calmly. "Why do you think we brought her?"

"Look," I said. "He was alone in it when it crashed. How could she possibly know?"

"He told her."

"You'll never find it in a million years."

"We will. He knew where it was, and was certain he could go back to it, or he wouldn't have hired you. So it has to be near some definite location, a reef or something. And if he knew, he could tell her. She's already given me the general location. It's to the westward of Scorpion Reef. You know the spot?"

"It's on the chart," I said curtly. "Listen, Barclay. You're stupid as hell. Even if you found the plane, that money's not recoverable. I didn't tell her, because the main thing they wanted was to get away from your bunch, but that currency's pulp by now. It's been submerged for weeks —."

"Money?" he asked. There was faint surprise in his voice.

"Don't be cute. You're not looking for that plane just to recover

the ham sandwich he probably had with him."

"She told you there was money on the plane? Is that it?"

"Of course that's it. What else? They were trying to get to some place in Central America so they could quit running from you and your gorillas —"

"I wondered what she told you."

"What do you mean?"

"You're nuts, Manning. We're not looking for any money. We're after something he stole from us."

"I don't believe it."

"It's not important what you believe. But what makes you so sure, when you'd never met him and knew nothing about him at all?"

"I know her. She wouldn't lie about it."

He chuckled. "Wouldn't she?"

The *Ballerina* began lifting slowly on the long groundswell running in through the mouth of the jetties. I searched the darkness ahead and could see the seabuoy winking on and off. I wondered why Barclay had tried to get off a cock-and-bull story like that. He was in control; why bother to lie?

"I found their bag, the one she sent aboard."

I looked around. It was the voice of George Barfield, down below.

"Any chart in it?" Barclay asked.

"No." Barfield came out carrying something in one hand and sat down beside Barclay. "The satchel was in it, all right. About eighty thousand,

roughly. But no chart, none at all."

"What?" It exploded from me.

"What's the matter with Don Quixote?" Barfield asked. "Somebody goose him?"

"Could be he just got the point," Barclay murmured. "She told him that money was in the plane."

"Oh," Barfield said. "Well, I wanted to see everything before I died, and now I have. A man over thirty who still believes women."

I felt sick. "Shut up, you punk." I said. "Put that bag down and throw a flashlight on it. There's one on the starboard bunk."

"I've got it here." Barfield put the bag down, flipped on the light and I looked at bundle after bundle of twenties, fifties, and hundreds.

I sold my jewelry and borrowed what I could on the car. It's the last chance we'll ever have. I don't know why they're trying to kill him; it was something that happened at a party —

"All right," I said. "Turn it off, Barfield."

"You're supposed to say, 'turn it off, you punk.'"

"Shut up," I said.

"How long would it take you to learn enough navigation, Joey?"

"Too long," Barclay answered. "Leave him alone."

"I was pretty good at math," Barfield said. "Want me to try it? I could get sick of this guy."

"Stop it," Barclay ordered curtly. "Even if we could find the place alone, we still need a diver."

"Anybody with an aqualung."

"George," Barclay said softly.

"All right. All right."

"What's in the plane?" I asked.

"Diamonds," Barclay answered. "Lots of diamonds."

"Whose?"

"Ours."

"And she knows about it?"

"Yes."

I wanted to hear it all. "And they weren't trying to get to Central America?"

"Yes, they were, at first. But Macaulay couldn't take her in the plane because he had to take a diver."

I was a chump. A sucker. I'd believed her. Even when I'd had intelligence enough to realize the story sounded fishy I'd still believed it. She wouldn't lie. Oh, no, of course not. Hell, how stupid could you get? She couldn't go in the plane because he'd had to add a fuel tank to stretch out its cruising radius. I was their last chance to escape; she had trusted me with all the money they had left — She must have been laughing herself sick all the time. I even imagined her telling her husband about it. *Dear, this poor sap will believe anything.*

And because I'd believed it I had killed that poor vicious little gunman and now the police would be looking for me as long as I lived. Only I wasn't going to be living very long. I was scheduled for extinction when I found Macaulay's plane and brought up what they wanted.

So was she. And wasn't that too bad? I wondered if she realized just what her chances were of selling Barclay and that big thug a sob-story of some kind. As soon as she told them where to look for that plane she was through. There should have been some satisfaction in knowing her double-crossing had got her killed as well as me, but when I looked for it it wasn't there.

So I was going back to feeling sorry for her? I was like hell. The dirty, lying, double-crossing — I stopped, puzzled. If she knew what was in the plane and where it was, why hadn't they grabbed her off long ago? Why had they kept trying to sweat Macaulay out of hiding so they could take him alive and make him tell, when they could have picked her up any time they pleased?

What the hell, was I still trying to find a way out for her? Of course they hadn't wanted her as long as there was a chance she would lead them to Macaulay. Her information about the plane would be second-hand, and they'd only taken her as second choice after Macaulay was dead. She was all they had left.

Well, I thought, they didn't have much.

14.

Barclay had me set a course for west of scorpion reef. Barfield watched me plot it in the chart-room.

I gave Barclay the corrected

course, and he let her fall off another point.

"Now," he said, "Ever handle a sailboat, George?"

"No," Barfield replied, across from me. "But if your nipple-headed friend can do it, anybody can."

"Well, you won't have to," Barclay said. "Manning and I will split the watches. You'll be on deck when he has it and I'm asleep. Mrs. Macaulay can have the forward part of the cabin; you, I, and Manning can sleep in the two bunks in the after part. And Manning won't go down there when one of us is asleep."

"It's after twelve now," he went on. Get some sleep, George. Manning can stretch out here in the cockpit and I'll take the first watch, until six. When Manning relieves me, you'll have to come on deck."

Barfield grunted something and went below, carrying the satchel.

I sat down, as near Barclay as I dared, and lit a cigarette. "It would be tragic," I said, "if he blew his stack and killed me before I found your lousy plane for you and the two of you could take turns at it."

"Why should we kill you?"

"Save it," I said. "I knew all along you wouldn't. Just give me a letter of recommendation. You know, something like: 'This will introduce Mr. Manning, the only living witness to the fact that we killed Macaulay and that his widow is innocent —'"

"Not necessarily," he said. "You can't go to the police. You're wanted for murder yourself."

He knew I'd have everything to lose and nothing to gain. But if I were dead and lying somewhere in two hundred fathoms of water there was no chance at all. And .45 cartridges were cheap.

I moved a little nearer, watching his face. It was calm and imperturbable in the faint glow from the binacle. I could almost reach him.

The eyes were suddenly full of a mocking humor. "Here," he said. He handed the .45 automatic to me butt first. "Is this what you want?"

For a fraction of a second I was too startled to do anything. Then I recovered myself and grabbed it out of his hand.

"You really wanted it?" he asked solicitously.

"Come about," I said. "Take her back to the seabuoy."

"What an actor!" His voice was amused.

"You don't think I'd kill you?"
"No."

"So it's not loaded?" Completely deflated, I pulled the slide back. I stared. It *was* loaded.

"You won't pull the trigger," he said, "for several reasons. You can't go back to Sanport, because of the police. You couldn't shoot a man in cold blood. You aren't the type —"

"Go on," I said.

"The third reason is that Barfield is down there in the cabin with another gun, with Mrs. Macaulay.

If you try anything, she gets it."

"I don't give a damn what happens to Mrs. Macaulay," I said.

He smiled. "You think you don't, but that would change with the first scream. You don't have the stomach for that either."

"I'm the original gutless wonder. Is that it?"

"No. You're just weak in a couple of spots where you can't be in a business like this. I've sized you up since that afternoon at the lake."

"Then you knew what she was up to? That's the reason you shoved off and left us?"

"Naturally. Also the reason we roughed you up without really hurting you, that night on the beach. We wanted you to hurry and get this boat for them so we could find where Macaulay was hiding. It worked, except that he forced us to kill him." That's that, and now I'll take my gun back."

Sweat broke out on my face. I had only to squeeze the trigger, ever so gently, and there would be only one of them. He watched me coolly, mockingly.

My finger tightened. I didn't care what happened to her, did I? I cursed her silently, bitterly, hating her for being alive, for being here.

"George," Barclay said quietly.

I went limp. I handed the gun to him, feeling sick and weak all over.

"What is it?" Barfield's voice asked from the companionway.

"Nothing," Barclay said.

I lit a cigarette. My hands shook.

He had wanted me to realize the futility of jumping one of them to get his gun as long as she was where the other could get her. I detested her. Maybe I even actively hated her. She and her lying had ruined everything for me, I was sick with contempt when I thought of her, and yet he'd known he could tie my hands completely by threatening her with violence. I was "weak" all right.

"The hell with Mrs. Macaulay," I said. "What did Macaulay do?"

"He stole three-quarters of a million dollars worth of diamonds from us. Since you were in the salvage business," he went on, "you must have known the *Shetland Queen*."

I looked up suddenly. "Sure. I remember her."

She had gone down in about ten fathoms, off Campeche Bank last fall and the underwriters had let a contract to salvage as much of the cargo as wasn't ruined. They had saved some machinery and several thousand cases of whiskey that somehow hadn't been smashed. The crew had been saved.

"So that's the first time your diamonds were dunked," I said. "But where does Macaulay fit in?"

I began to get the connection. Salvage — underwriters; the part about his being in the marine insurance business was true.

"They were aboard the *Shetland Queen*," continued Barclay. "But they didn't appear on the cargo manifest or any of the Customs lists.

They were in some cases of tinned cocoa which were going to a small importing firm in New Orleans. A cheap way to ship diamonds but tough to explain if something happens to the ship, as in this case. The cocoa was insured, for two or three hundred dollars. We would have looked stupid trying to collect three-quarters of a million dollars from the underwriters when we'd paid a premium on a valuation of three hundred dollars. We couldn't explain that to Customs either.

"Benson and Teen had paid off all claims, including ours, and were salvaging what they could, but they weren't going to waste time bringing up a few dollars worth of tinned cocoa. They paid, and wrote it off. We made a few feelers. Since they were working inside the ship anyway, why not bring up our cocoa and let us drop our claim? They brushed us. We let it drop, before they got suspicious. We had to wait until they were finished and then do our own salvaging.

"But then some — uh — competitors of ours got wise and also tried to buy the cocoa from Benson & Teen. This was a little too much for Macaulay, who was in charge of the operation. He sent a confidential agent down to the salvage operations to look into this chocolate business on the quiet. This guy asked to have the cocoa brought up and, since he was acting for Benson & Teen through Macaulay, they brought it up. He found out what

made it so valuable, devalued it, and phoned Macaulay.

"They had two problems. The first was getting the stones into the States without paying duty or answering any embarrassing questions as to where they had come from. The second was to keep us from getting them. We had two men in the Mexican port keeping an eye on the cargo that was brought in. Macaulay solved both problems at once. He'd been a bomber pilot in the Second World War, and held a pilot's license. He came down to the Gulf Coast, chartered a big amphibian, and came after his agent and the stones. They were to meet in a laguna some ten or fifteen miles east of the Mexican port. They did, but our men were there too. They'd followed Macaulay's man and lost him in the jungle, but saw the plane coming in and got there just as the man was climbing aboard. They recognized Macaulay and opened fire, killing the other man, but Macaulay got away in the plane."

"With your stupid diamonds," I said.

He nodded. "We thought so. Macaulay didn't go back to New York, knowing what he was up against now. His wife disappeared also. The firm said he had suffered a heart attack and resigned. He'd told them, earlier, that he had to go to the Coast because of illness in the family. We almost caught up to him two or three times. He never tried to sell any of the diamonds. We

figured that, just about the time we ran him down in Sanport. He hadn't sold them because he didn't have them.

"He escaped us in Sanport, taking off in a plane with a man carrying an aqualung diving outfit. Macaulay, by the way, couldn't swim. When we learned about the diver, we knew what had happened. The metal box with the diamonds had fallen into the water when Macaulay's friend was killed.

"We stuck close to Mrs. Macaulay, knowing she'd soon lead us to him. But just about that time we suspected he was back in Sanport because of a little story in the paper. About five days after Macaulay took off, a fishing boat docked with a man it had picked up in a rubber liferaft on the Campeche Bank. He told them he was a pilot for some Mexican company and had crashed while going from Tampico to Progreso alone in a seaplane. He took off the minute the fishing boat docked."

"I get it now," I said. "As soon as she got in touch with me you knew the castaway was Macaulay. And you realized he had crashed out there somewhere, but that he knew exactly where the plane was and could find it again, or he wouldn't have been trying to hire a diver."

Barclay nodded. "Correct. We also suspected he was in the house, but taking him alive wasn't going to be easy. He was armed and panicky."

"The thing that puzzles me," I

said, "is that you and your meat-headed thugs never did put the arm on her to find out where the plane was. You're convinced now she knows where it is, but you let her come and go there for a week or more right under your noses."

"We weren't certain she knew then."

"But you are now. Why?"

He lit a cigarette. Sanport's lights were fading on the horizon.

"It's simple," he explained. "I wrote Macaulay a letter two days ago advising him to tell her."

I shook my head. "Say that again. You wrote him a letter — where?"

"To his house. Even if he weren't there she would get it to him."

"And he'd be sure to tell her, just because you suggested it? Why?"

He smiled again. "Sure, he was an insurance man, wasn't he? I just pointed out that there was always the chance something might happen to him and he ought to protect her."

"By telling her where the plane was?" I asked incredulously. "So he could guarantee her being put through the wringer by you —."

He shook his head gently. "You still don't see Macaulay's point of view. He knew she'd be questioned. But suppose she *didn't* know where the plane was?"

I saw the bastard's logic. "Good God —"

"Right. Life insurance. He was leaving her the only thing that could stop the interrogation."

I saw then what Macaulay must

have gone through in those last few hours. He had to tell her.

I leaned my elbows on my knees and looked at him. "*You dirty son —*"

I stopped. I'd forgotten him. She'd been telling the truth. Barclay had sent that letter to Macaulay only two days ago. I had to talk to her.

Barclay let me, too. He knew he was tying me tighter to Shannon and that I'd be easier to handle that way, so he called Barfield up. Barfield liked his sleep a lot more than he liked me. I could see his face burning as I went below.

She was lying on the starboard bunk with her face in her arms.

15.

"Shannon," I said.

"What, Bill?" Her voice was muffled.

"How long have you known what these gorillas are after?"

She turned slowly and looked up with listless gray eyes.

"Since three this afternoon," she said.

I felt weak with relief or joy, or both of them. I'd been right. All the bitterness was gone and I wanted to take her in my arms. Instead I lit a cigarette. "I want to apologize," I said.

She shook her head. "Don't. I sold you out, Bill."

"No," I whispered. "You didn't know. I thought you had lied, but

you hadn't. It doesn't matter that he was lying to you."

"Don't make it any worse, Bill. I had six hours to call you, and you could have got away. I tried to, but I couldn't. I thought I owed him that, in spite of what he did. Maybe I was wrong, but I think I'd still do it the same way. I don't know how to explain —"

"You don't have to," I said. "You were telling the truth all the time. That's all that matters."

She stared up at me. "Why does it?"

"I don't know," I said.

I wanted to shout it out to her, or sing it, but I kept my face blank and lit a cigarette for myself.

"I'm sorry about it," I said gently.

She didn't answer for a moment. Then she said, "It's all right. He didn't have a chance, anyway. I think they knew he was in the house, and anything we tried would have failed."

"Why hadn't he ever told you?" I asked.

"Ashamed, I think. He wasn't really a criminal, Bill. There was just too much of it, and it was too easy, and no one would ever know."

"It's too bad," I said. "It's a dirty shame."

She turned her face a little, and her eyes met mine squarely. "You know I must have suspected it, don't you? Nobody could be stupid enough not to guess there must be more to it than he told me. I did suspect it. I can't deny it. I was

cheating when I told you what he told me, because I was afraid it wasn't the truth, or not all the truth. But what could I do? Tell you I thought my husband was lying? Did I owe you more than I did him? Doesn't eight years of time mean anything, or the fact he had never lied to me before, or that he'd always been wonderful to me? I'd do it again. You'll just have to think what you will."

"You know what I think? I'll tell you about it some day."

"Wait, Bill," she whispered. "You don't know all of it yet. When you do, you'll think I'm a fool. He was going to leave me. He wasn't on his way to Honduras when he crashed. He was going to destroy the plane and disappear somewhere on the Florida coast."

I got it then. "And you'd have gone on to Honduras, thinking he would be there? And when he wasn't, you'd have been certain he was dead? Down somewhere in the Gulf, or in the jungle?"

"Yes," she said. Then she smiled a little bitterly. "But I wasn't the one he wanted to convince. If Barclay and his men had managed to follow me down there, they'd give him up as dead too."

"But running out on you? Deserting you, leaving you stranded in a foreign country?"

"Not quite stranded, if you mean money," she said. "You see, it wasn't in the plane. I thought it was, but it was in a bag of his I was sup-

posed to bring down with me. None of it's clear-cut, Bill. He was leaving me, and he had to double-cross his friend who bought the plane, but he wanted me to have the money."

Conscience money, I thought.

Suddenly she was crying silently. "Does it make much sense to you that I still didn't call and tell you, after that?"

"Does it have to?" I asked.

She put both hands alongside her face and said slowly, around the tightness in her throat. "I don't know how to explain it. When he told me that, I knew I would leave him, but I couldn't run out on him until he was safe."

I tried to see Macaulay, and failed again. How could he inspire that kind of loyalty on one hand and be capable of the things he had done, on the other? I said nothing about it because it might not have occurred to her and it would only hurt her, but he had killed that diver, or intended to until the airplane crash saved him the trouble. The way he had it planned, there couldn't be any second person who knew he was still alive. He'd probably killed him as soon as the poor devil brought up the box in that Mexican laguna. And he would have killed me, in some way.

Then I thought of something else. "Do you really know where that plane is?" I asked.

She nodded. "Yes. He told me very carefully. And I memorized everything he said."

I wondered. She thought she did. Barclay was convinced she did. But apparently I was the only one aboard who had any idea of the immensity of the Gulf of Mexico and the smallness of an airplane. If you didn't know within a few hundred yards you could drag for a thousand years and never find it.

Not that I cared if they found their stupid diamonds or not. It was something else. If they didn't, Barclay would think she was stalling. "—suppose she *didn't* know," he'd said softly. The implication was sickening.

"He didn't show you on a chart?" I asked. "Or make a drawing?"

"No," she said. "But it's near a shoal about fifty miles north-northeast of Scorpion Reef. It's around a half mile long, running north and south. The plane sank two miles due east of it."

"Was there white water, or did he just see the shoal from the air before he crashed?"

"He didn't say."

That wasn't good. You had to assume too many things. You had to assume that Macaulay had known where he was himself and that the water was shallow enough at that spot to cause surf, so we could find it. If he'd merely seen a difference in the coloration of the water from above, we didn't have a chance. Then you had to have faith in his ability to estimate his bearing and distance from the shoal in the wild scramble to launch the rubber raft.

I tried to reassure myself. He could navigate, or he wouldn't have tried to fly the Gulf in the first place. He gave the location in reference to Scorpion Reef, so he must have sighted Scorpion. Fifty miles was only a few minutes in a plane, so he couldn't have gone far wrong in that distance. And there had to be visible white water. He'd been intending to go back to it in a boat, hadn't he? He must have known what he was doing.

Then something else struck me. "Wait," I said. "Barclay told me to set a course to the *west* of Scorpion Reef. Are you sure you said east?"

"Yes. He must have misunderstood. I said north-north-east."

"Just a minute," I said. I went out into the after part of the cabin and leaned over the chart. With the parallel rulers I laid down a line 33 degrees from Scorpion Reef, picked fifty miles off the edge of the chart with the dividers, and set them on the line. I stared. There was no shoal there.

Beyond, another 20 or 25 miles, lay the Northern Shelves, a wide area of shoaling water and one notation that three fathoms had been reported in 1907. Could he have meant that? But if he had, we didn't have a chance. Not a chance in the world.

In the first place, if he couldn't fix his estimated position within twenty-five miles that short a time after having sighted Scorpion Reef his navigation was so sloppy you had

to throw it all out. There went your first assumption, the one you *had* to have even to start: that Macaulay had known where he was himself. And in the second place, that whole area was shoal. God knew how many places you might find white water at dead low tide with a heavy sea running. Trying to find an airplane with no more than that to go on was so absurd it was fantastic.

Fumbling a little with nervousness, I swung the rulers around and ran out a line NNW from Scorpion Reef. Barclay said she had told him that direction. I looked at it and shook my head. That was out over the hundred fathom curve. Nothing there at all. And if he'd been headed for the Florida coast he wouldn't have been over there in the first place.

I thought swiftly. We'd never find that plane. To anybody even remotely acquainted with salvage work the whole thing was farcical, except there was nothing funny about it here, under the circumstances. They were going to think she was stalling. She'd already contradicted herself once, or Barclay had misunderstood her.

Three-quarters of a million dollars was the prize. Brutality was their profession. I thought of it and felt chilly along the back.

16.

I was still looking at the chart when the idea began to come to me.

I looked at my watch. It was just a little less than two hours since we'd cleared the seabuoy. Guessing our speed at five knots would put us ten miles down that line. Growing excited now, I marked the estimated position and spanned the distance to the beach westward of us with the dividers. I measured it off against the edge of the chart. It was a little less than nine miles.

Hope surged up in me. We could do it. There was still enough glow in the sky over Sanport to guide us, and if there weren't all we had to do was keep the sea behind us and go downwind. The water was warm. You could stay in it all day without losing too much body heat.

I hurried back through the curtain and told her my idea.

She was scared. She couldn't swim very well, but when I told her there wasn't a chance in the world of finding that plane and that they'd kill us anyway, she agreed.

I told her to play sick, grab the belt as she got past Barfield, and go overboard holding it while I handled Barclay.

She nodded. "Thank you for everything," she said softly. She thought we were going to drown.

I put my hand against her cheek. "We'll make it," I said. Just touching her brought back that intense longing to take her in my arms. I stood up abruptly and went back on deck. It was very dark. Barfield growled something and went below. I sat down in the cockpit, on Bar-

clay's right and as near him as I dared.

"Nice talk?" he asked.

"Very nice," I answered.

"She really didn't know what he was doing, did she?"

"No."

"Could be," he said.

My eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness now. I looked astern and could still see the faint glow over the city. Involuntarily, I shuddered. There was a lot of dark water between here and the shore.

"Did she tell you where the plane was?" Barclay asked.

"Yes," I said. I repeated what she had said, and asked, "Where did you get the impression it was west of Scorpion Reef?"

"That's what she said," Barclay answered. "She said NNW."

"She was suffering from shock," I said coldly. "I believe she had just seen her husband butchered in cold blood. And, anyway, it's a cinch he wouldn't have been to the westward of Scorpion Reef if he'd been heading for the Florida coast."

"Maybe," he said. "We'll see about it after breakfast. Get some sleep and don't try anything stupid."

I started to say something, but at that moment I heard voices in the cabin. She had started up.

"Where do you think you're going?" Barfield's voice growled.

"I—feel nauseated," she said. I could barely hear her. "—fresh air—"

"Hey, Joey," Barfield called out. "All right to let her up?"

I waited, holding my breath.

"No," Barclay said. "Find her a pail."

If she hadn't passed him we had no chance at all, but it was now or never. I swung. My fist crashed into the blurred whiteness of Barclay's face, and at the same time I yelled, "Run!"

Barclay fell back, clawing in his pocket for the gun. She came up through the hatch, moving fast, with Barfield shouting behind her. I could see her for a brief second, standing erect on the deck at the forward end of the cockpit with the bulky life-preserver clutched to her breast. Then she was lunging and falling outward, splashing somewhere in the darkness. I grabbed Barclay's jacket and pushed him into Barfield as he came lunging up. I slid over the rail, and water closed over me. Even as I was going down I tried to keep myself oriented.

The *Ballerina* was off course now, all of its angles gone. I started to swim back hoping to spot her blonde head or the white of the life belt, but the whitecaps were confusing.

When the sloop was some 75 yards away, I lifted my head and called out, not too loudly, "Shannon. Shannon!" There was no answer. I wondered if I had gone beyond her. I began to be afraid, and called out again.

This time I heard her. "Here," she said. "Over this —" The voice cut

off, and I knew she had gone under. She was off to the left, downwind. I turned.

Another sea broke over me. Then I was floundering in the trough. The blonde head broke surface right beside me. "Thank God," I said silently, and grabbed her dress. She clasped her arms tightly about my neck and tried to pull herself up. We went under. I felt suddenly cold in water that was warm as tea. She had *both* arms about me.

Our heads came out. I shook water from my face. "Shannon! Where's the lifebelt?"

She sputtered and fought for breath. "It — I —" she said, and gasped again. "I lost it."

17.

It was the bright sunlight streaming into the cabin that brought me out of it slowly. And then the wonderful nightmare of the night in the water came back to me. The lifebelt was gone, and she knew we couldn't make it. Yet she'd ignored Barclay's hailing from the *Ballerina* as he tried to locate us in the darkness. She'd been wonderful. Scared, but she'd followed my directions fully. Stripped for buoyancy, we tried the hopeless push toward Sanport, orienting on the stars.

It was dawn and we hadn't covered a third of the way, when I choked up enough breath to tell her.

"I couldn't tell you before," I said. "Even — if he had run out on

you. But doesn't matter now. Have to tell you. I love you. You've never been out of my mind since you walked out on edge of that pier —"

She didn't say anything. She brought her arms up very slowly and put them about my neck. We went under, our lips together, arms tight about each other. It was like falling endlessly through a warm, rosy cloud. I seemed to realize, very dimly, that it was water we were sinking through and that if we didn't stop it and swim up we'd drown right there, but apparently there was nothing I could do about it. I didn't want to turn her loose long enough to swim up. We went on falling, through warmth and ecstasy and colors.

We'd broken surface again, and then I'd seen the masts of the sloop. They were still looking for us. Suddenly I realized she'd let go, voluntarily. I'd gotten to her, even as I realized that the sloop was bearing down on us. Barclay'd made good use of those 7x50 binoculars. I remember Barfield's whistling as he dragged her aboard. Then I'd blacked out.

It was four in the afternoon when Barfield shook me awake. The husky guy hated my guts all right, but evidently Barclay had told him to lay off. He told me to make some sandwiches and coffee, wake Shannon, and get up on deck. It was while she was dressing and I was preparing the food that the idea came to me. If we could shake these

two, all problems were solved. Why go back? Here was the *Ballerina*, the girl I knew I wanted, and eighty thousand dollars. We could change our names, get married in one of those little Caribbean ports. We'd change the name of the boat and its Port of Registry. We'd stay away from the big ports, cruise the world, and they'd never find us.

The dream faded abruptly. My two friends upstairs were calling from on deck. You couldn't dream them away.

I had five days, maybe a week. They had to slip up sometime — I hoped.

Shannon helped me bring the food.

Barclay was at the tiller, and Barfield lounged on the port side, his legs outstretched. He drew them in, and grinned. "Going for a swim, honey?" he asked.

She glanced briefly at him as if he were something that had crawled out of a ditch after a rain, and sat down on the starboard side holding the plate of sandwiches in her lap.

He looked to me. "Take the helm."

He took a sandwich, glanced at me and then at Shannon. "We're about fifty miles from land. Don't try any more swimming stunts and forget about the dinghy. I've thrown away the oars. We'll pistol whip you, Blondie, if either of you tries anything again.

"Now let's get down to business. Tell us exactly what your husband said about that plane crash."

Shannon stared at him, contemptuously.

"All right. It was late in the afternoon, he said, near sunset, when he picked up Scorpion Reef. He was heading for the Florida coast somewhere above Fort Myers. A few minutes later his starboard engine caught fire. He couldn't put it out, and knew he was going to crash. He had noticed a reef or shoal below him just a minute or two before, and tried to get to the downwind side of it, where the sea wouldn't be so rough, but he couldn't make it. He crashed on the east side of it, about two miles off, and the plane sank almost immediately. He just had time to climb out on a wing and throw the raft in the water. As you probably know, he couldn't swim at all."

"Why didn't he try to get the diamonds off with him?"

"He had stowed the box in a locker so it wouldn't go flying around in rough weather. The locker was aft, already under water."

"What about the diver?"

That hurt her. She hesitated, sickness in her eyes. "He said the man didn't have his belt fastened, and was killed in the crash."

Barclay lashed it at her suddenly, "Why was he so sure of his exact bearing from that reef? He didn't have time to take a compass reading before the plane went down, and he didn't have a compass on the raft."

She was quite calm. "It was late afternoon, I said. The sun was set-

ting. The plane, the very northern end of the surf on the shoal, and the sun were all in one straight line."

She looked around suddenly at me. "I remember now, you asked me that, didn't you, Bill? Whether he could see surf from the raft. And I'd forgotten."

I nodded. It would make a difference, all right; but you still had to find the reef. It was hopeless.

Barclay lit a cigarette. "Okay. Now, what was the position?"

"Fifty miles north-north-east of Scorpion Reef."

He stared coldly. "You said westward last night."

"I'm sure I didn't," she replied.

"Make up your mind — fast."

"It's north-north-east."

"We'll see," he said crisply. "George, get that chart, the parallel rulers, and dividers."

Barfield brought them up and the two of them studied the chart. Shannon regarded them as if they were lice. Barclay's face was thoughtful. "North-north-east —"

I knew what he would find, and waited, tensely.

He picked the distance off and set the dividers along the line. Then he turned his head and stared bleakly at Shannon Macaulay.

"Come again?"

"You asked me what he told me," she said indifferently. "I have just repeated it, word for word. What else would you like me to do?"

"Tell the truth, for once."

"I am telling the truth."

He sighed. "The chartmaker was lying. The nearest sounding shown here is 45 fathoms." He paused and nodded to Barfield. "George."

I was too wild to be scared. "Listen, Barclay. This whole thing is going to come unzipped. If he hurts her, it's you I'm coming for, and you're going to have to use that gun to stop me. If you think you can find that reef without my help, go ahead."

It hung poised, ready to go either way. "Don't be a damned fool," I went on. "If she were going to lie, would she give you a stupid position like that? Maybe there is a shoal there, or somewhere within fifteen miles or so. All that area hasn't been sounded. Macaulay could have been off in his reckoning. The only thing to do is go there and see, and you'll never get there unless I take you. You name it. Now."

He saw I was right.

Barfield lounged on the seat with a cup of coffee in his hand. "The hero," he said. "We've got a real, live hero aboard, Joey."

The breeze held steady out of the northeast, day after day, and the miles ran behind us. I'd bought time for us, but I hadn't bought much, and every day's run was bringing us nearer the showdown. I knew what would happen when we got down there and couldn't find any shoal. Something had to happen before then; we had to get a break.

But they didn't drop a stitch. When one was asleep the other was watching me, never letting me get too near. And there was always Shannon Macaulay. They had me tied, and they knew it. It was unique, a masterpiece in its own way; we were at sea in a 36-foot sloop, so all four of us had to be sitting right on top of the explosion if it came. I couldn't hide her or get her out of the way.

It was noon, the fourth day out of Sanport. I was working out our position on the chart when an idea began to nudge me. We wouldn't pass near enough to Scorpion Reef to sight it, so they had to take my word as to where we were. Barclay knew approximately, of course, because he checked the compass headings against each day's position, but he had to accept my figures for the distance run.

I was thinking. It might work.

Twenty or twenty-five miles beyond the point where Macaulay was supposed to have crashed lay the beginnings of the Northern Shelves. If there were a shoal or reef in a hundred miles it would be out there. The chances were a thousand to one that it was somewhere in that vast shallow area that he had actually gone into the drink, even though they were about a hundred billion to one against our ever finding where. So if I put us out there when they thought we were on the location she had given them —

We might find a shoal. And any shoal would do.

I set the little cross down 15 miles to the westward and a little north of our actual position and tore up my work sheet. Take ten miles out tomorrow noon and I'd have it made without exciting Barclay's suspicions. It was Wednesday. I told him we'd make it by Friday.

I didn't say anything to Shannon. The object of the whole thing was to get her off the boat, and if she knew why I wanted her off she wouldn't go. She'd have some foolish idea about not letting me face it alone, and I'd never convince her that alone was the only way I had a chance.

Barclay apparently suspected nothing as he checked positions with me the next day. In fact he seemed satisfied with the efforts I had been taking all that day. We kept looking for white water, listening for the sound of surf breaking; but no signs of shoal appeared.

Barclay had become more quiet, cold, and unapproachable as Friday wore on and we saw nothing.

Barfield's face was ugly as he watched Shannon now, and several times I saw him glance questioningly at Barclay. We were all in the cockpit. I had the tiller.

"Listen," I said harshly. "Both of you. Try to get it through your heads. We're not looking for the corner of Third and Main. There are no street signs out here. We're in the general area. But Macaulay could have been out ten miles in his reckoning. My figures could be from

two to five miles out in any direction. Error adds up."

He was listening, his face expressionless.

I went on. I had to make them see. "When Macaulay crashed, there was a heavy sea running. There's not much now but a light ground swell. There could have been surf piled up that day high enough to see it five miles away, and now you might think it was just a tide-rip. We've got to criss-cross the whole area, back and forth. It may take two days, or even longer."

He looked coldly at me. "Don't take too long."

Dawn came, the sea was empty and blue as far as the eye could see.

Barclay took the glasses and stood up, scanning the horizon all the way around. Then he said, "Make some coffee, George."

Barfield grunted and went below. In a few minutes Barclay followed him. I could hear the low sound of their voices in the cabin. She sat across from me in the cockpit, her face stamped with weariness. When she saw me looking at her she tried to smile.

I turned and hurried back to her. "Go forward," I said. "Lie down on deck, against the forward side of the cabin. Stay there. If anything happens to me, you can raise the jib alone. Just the jib. Keep running before the wind in a straight line and you'll hit the coast of Mexico or Texas—"

"No," she whispered fiercely.

I peeled her arms loose and pushed her. "Hurry!" She started to say something more, looked at my face, and turned, running forward. She stepped up from the cockpit and went along the starboard side of the cabin, stumbling once and almost falling.

I had to hurry. They'd be coming up any minute. I slipped forward and stood on the deck, looking down the hatch.

"Surf!" I yelled. "Surf, ho!"

Barclay came up fast, his head turning toward the direction of my arm. I hit him hard and he went sprawling over the side. I was falling too, on top of Barfield as he emerged from the hatch. He bulled his way up on deck, crashing us both down on the deck. A big fist beat at my face, as I groped for his throat. He got his gun out of his hip pocket. I chopped his hand hard enough, and it slid out of his hand along the grating.

He hit me on the temple and my head slammed back against the planks. He was coming to his knees, groping behind him for the gun. I tried to push myself up, and then beyond him I saw her. She ran along the deck and dropped into the cockpit. She picked up the gun and was swinging it at his head. He should have fallen, but it had no more effect on him than a dropped chocolate éclair. He heaved upward, lashing out behind him with one big arm. She fell, and her head struck the coaming at the forward end of the

cockpit. I came to my feet and lunged at him and we fell over and beyond her onto the edge of the deck just as the sloop rolled again and we slid over the side into the water.

I came out into sunlight and sparkling blue, and sobbed for air. Seconds went by, and I knew he wasn't coming up. He'd had the breath knocked out of him when we hit the deck, just before we slid overboard, and he'd drowned down there. I looked around again. There was no trace of Barclay.

I could hear the boat's engine behind me, fainter now, and I turned to see which way it was circling. I stared. It wasn't turning. It was two hundred yards away, going straight ahead for Yucatan with nobody at the helm. I didn't see her anywhere. She'd been knocked out when she fell. And I had lashed the tiller.

I reached down mechanically and started taking off my dungarees and slippers.

Even when you don't have anywhere to go, you keep swimming. I swam toward the boat, disappearing now, and toward the coast of Yucatan a hundred and twenty miles away. The sun was on my left. It climbed higher.

I didn't panic, but I had to be careful about letting the loneliness and immensity of it get hold of me or thinking too much about how near we had been to winning at last. I wondered if she had been killed, or badly hurt, and saw in a moment

that wasn't safe either. I concentrated on swimming. One stroke, and then another stroke. Don't think. Don't think about anything.

It could have been an hour, or two hours. I looked off to the right and saw the mast. It was at least a mile away and wouldn't see me, but I gave a sob of relief that almost strangled me because it meant she was all right. She'd only been knocked out. She'd probably never find me, but she could make it.

But the time I'd spent showing Shannon navigational and boat-handling points paid off. She had no idea where I'd gone overboard, but she was cutting the whole area into a big grid, searching.

Each time the ground swell lifted me, I kicked myself as high as I could and waved. Those binoculars paid off. I could see the boat headed toward me, and I knew that God-dess had her ancestral Viking fates working for us at last.

19.

We didn't have to do much talking about the way we felt. About all I could say for the next few days was "You Swede, you big, lovely, magnificent Swede." She seemed equally happy. I tried to brush aside the cloud that haunted her. Her last months with Macaulay; the strain of the chase had cut into her more deeply than I realized. I repeated the plans I had for changing the name of the boat and its port of

registry; for cruising the small ports where we'd be safe from any pursuit for the eighty thousand dollars which would take care of us both for a long time. She smiled agreement each time, but her eyes gave her away. Several times she awoke at night shivering and I knew it wasn't the tropical breezes. Something continued to haunt her, to keep her from the full paradise that should have been ours.

Time stood still for us. I spent the next few days painting the name, *Freya*, and San Juan as our port of registry on the stern. My living Freya — she liked that better than Swede — helped. She was a natural at anything you taught her. She learned to use the aqualung and we spent hours at it, diving down to look at the myriad wonders of marine life. She became fascinated with it as if it were another world.

And then it happened. We were far off the Northern shelves working toward the Yucatan straits. The chart told me we were right on the hundred fathom curve. It was a very hot sunny day and Shannon suggested we go in for a swim. She was beautiful as she adjusted her mask and dived over the side. I fixed my mask and went under the hull to see if we'd begun to collect any marine growth. It was cool and pleasant, and I paused to watch the silvery flow of hair about her head as she swam beneath me.

A few minutes later I noticed a small shovel-nosed shark off to one

side and below. I swam down to watch him. It was quite small and not dangerous. When I looked for Shannon she was gone. I swam to the surface but she was nowhere in sight. I began to be uneasy. But maybe she had gone back aboard for some reason. I was turning to look behind me again when a flash of silver caught the corners of my eyes at the edge of the mask. I froze with horror. She was at least a hundred feet below me, going straight down.

Why had she done it? It had been an accident. It must have been. She was deliriously happy with me. She had no reason for throwing her life away. The pressure must have twisted her sense of direction. She'd been confused, and I'd been too far away to help.

No! She'd known exactly what she was doing. There had been hints. She'd known the violence and the terror of being hunted and had said there's no escape. That's why she'd looked at me as if I were an innocent child when I ranted about those little ports. She knew we'd never get away with it.

Alone, I found myself sighting again for 23.50 north, 88.45 west, the spot where she'd gone down. Macaulay could be right. It could be possible to find a pinpoint in the Gulf. There was the exact spot! See, where that seagull is on that drift wood. Looking down into the water I could see a silvery shape.

It was beckoning up at me. I heard

her voice say, "Come with me, we'll live in rapture."

Something heavy was on my shoulders. I felt straps across my chest. I was wearing the aqualung.

I screamed.

I can still close my eyes and see the whole thing — the blue, and that last, haunting flash of silver, gesturing as it died. It was beckoning. Toward the rapture. The rapture . . .

20.

It was after 2 A.M. when the master of the *Joseph H. Hallock* closed the journal. The poor devil, he thought. The poor, tortured devil. Four o'clock — and we raised the sloop a little after five.

Changing the name of the sloop didn't alter the identity of any kind of seagoing craft. There were papers. And more papers. It was as futile as writing your own name on a borrowed passport. Manning should have known, too, that it took about ten pounds of paperwork and red tape to dock at any foreign port — including fishing villages. They all had port authorities, and they all demanded consular clearances and bills of health from the last port of call; registry certificate, customs lists, crew lists, and so on, ad infinitum, and in the case of pleasure craft they probably required passports and visas for everybody aboard. Manning should have known they didn't have a prayer of a chance.

He was in his bunk puzzling over it. Suddenly he sat upright. "I'll be damned," he said softly. "I'll just be damned. It would be perfect."

It was sunset again, two days later. The tanker was waddling, full-bellied, up the coast of Florida just south of Fowey Rocks. She was well inshore from the main axis of the Stream, since they had made arrangements by radio to have a Coast Guard boat meet them off Miami and take the *Freya* off their hands. Or at least that was the master's excuse to Mr. Davidson, the mate.

When you resolved the contradiction and acknowledged that Manning couldn't possibly have believed any of that moonlit dream about escape to the tropics in a boat, he mused, what did you have left? You had left the twin facts that Manning was a writer, and that he was trying to save himself and that girl he was so much in love with.

They had nowhere to go, the girl had said. Nowhere to go, that is, as long as they were being sought by a gang of criminals and also by the police. But if they weren't being actively sought by anyone, they could come back to their own country, where they would attract less attention than anywhere else on earth. And they would no longer be sought if everyone believed them dead.

But I don't know any of this, he thought. I'm only theorizing. I don't really want to know, absolutely and finally, because I'd be obligated to report it. They hadn't committed any real crime, unless it was a crime to defend oneself, and he hoped they got away with it.

Then he saw what he had been watching for, astern and slightly inshore from the *Freya*. It could be driftwood, or it could be a head, or two heads. He peered aft in the gathering twilight, and almost raised the glasses.

No, he thought reluctantly; if I *know* I have to report it. But nobody is interested in the unverified vaporings of a sentimental old man.

They would make it ashore without any trouble, with the lifebelts. And they probably had enough money to buy some clothes to replace their bathing suits. Not that they would be likely to attract any attention in Florida, however, if they went around in their bathing attire for years.

But they were drifting back rapidly. Would he have to lift the glasses to satisfy himself? The objects separated momentarily for an instant before they merged again as one. And one of them had been definitely lighter in color than the other. The master sighed.

"Bon voyage," he said softly. He turned and went into the chartroom with the glasses still swinging from his neck.

MUGGED AND PRINTED

JAMES T. FARRELL, whose previous appearances in *Manhunt* have been greeted with enthusiastic letters from our readers, returns this month with the bitter and realistically brutal *Side Street*. Farrell, author of the Studs Lonigan trilogy and the Danny O'Neill novels (the latest of which, *The Face Of Time*, has received praise from both readers and reviewers), worked at many different



jobs before he finally turned to writing. He's used many of his own jobs as background material for his novels — he was a clerk in a cigar store, a newspaper reporter and a gas-station attendant, among other occupations.

RICHARD DEMING's newest novelette, *The War*, introduces an unusual new detective character created especially for *Manhunt's* pages.

Clancy Ross is completely unlike any other detective you've met — for one thing, he has a working agreement with a few criminal gangs in his city. Ross is every bit as tough as you'd expect from Deming, the creator of the hard-bitten, one-legged



private eye, Manville Moon, who's appeared in the Rinehart novels *The Gallows In My Garden*, *Tweak The Devil's Nose* and *Whistle Past The Graveyard*.

HAL ELLSON's newest Ballantine novel, *Rock*, will soon be on the stands. It's a new and expanded treatment of the idea he used in a *Manhunt* story, *Blood Brothers*. Ellson will also have a collection of short stories coming out soon — and, like *Rock* and his famous best-sellers *Duke*, *Tomboy*, *The Golden Spike* and *Summer Street*, the stories feature the Harlem juvenile delinquents which he portrays with realism and toughness. Ellson's latest story for *Manhunt* is the startling *Pickup*, which deals with another phase of criminal life. We're sure you'll find it as exciting and different as his many other stories.



CHARLES WILLIAMS, whose newest complete novel, *Flight To Nowhere*, appears in this issue, is the author of many best-selling Gold Medal novels including *Hill Girl*, *Nothing In Her Way* and others. His books consistently receive accolades from reviewers, and several have sold nearly a million copies each. Williams' last novel for *Manhunt*, . . . *And Share Alike*, has just been published in expanded form by Gold Medal, under the title of *Madelon Butler*. Williams, who lives in California, is now at work on a new novel for Gold Medal.



RICHARD MARSTEN, author of the Gold Medal novel *Runaway Black*, returns in this issue with *The Big Day*, a detailed and convincing story of a perfect crime. ♦ DAVID ALEXANDER's *Uncle Tom* is one of the most unusual stories we've ever published. Alexander, author of *Paint The Town Black* and other Random House novels, is a consistent *Manhunt* favorite, and we'll be bringing you more of his work soon. ♦ ANDREW J. BURRIS and PHILIP WECK, two writers well-known to readers of other magazines, both make their debuts in this issue. Weck, a young writer who's already appeared in many detective magazines, offers his shocking new script, *The Muscle*, and Burris, one of the country's best-known fact-crime writers, has detailed the history of a very unusual killer in *Mass Production*.

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Perry's client doesn't remember what happened the night her husband was murdered. She can't recognize her own .38 — the murder weapon. Only two people can hear her. One is missing — the other is dead!

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Mason's client is accused of stealing \$40,000 in jewels. Then they accuse her of MURDER! Perry must save her—though he suspects she may be guilty!



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Perry sneaks into an apartment; finds an empty safe. Then a blonde slams the safe shut. Not sinister... except that the tenant had been MURDERED!

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RUNAWAY CORPSE

A client hires Mason to get a letter accusing her of planning to poison her husband. Perry finds blank paper! Police say Perry hid the REAL letter!

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